THEORY OF IMPRESSIONISM IN ENGLISH NOVEL (1880-1914)

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A study of the critical tenets of Thomas Hardy, Henry James, Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford.

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PREFACE

Novel as the 'Cindrella' of art forms is the last to enter into the critical controversy of imaginative writers and professional critics. And this latest of arts in language has suffered most from inadequate theoretical background and formal aesthetics. Dickens, Thackeray and the Bronte sisters, though quite conscious of their craft, did not choose to discuss the problem of their art coherently and systematically. Their brief and tentative suggestions about the theory of novel-writing does indicate an awareness of the aesthetic problems of the novel but they can hardly claim a place in the rank of major critics of fiction. In their criticism the demands on the novel could amount to almost anything: it ought to be realistic, it ought to be romantic, it ought to be plotted and planned, it ought to be an expression of divine inspiration. It should idealise life and record its trivialities, seeking to improve it directly, indirectly or not at all. It is not until the last two decades of the nineteenth century that we find the traditional English novel receiving self-conscious treatment at the hands of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy and cross-currents of French novel criticism begin to influence the literary judgements in England.

Flaubert and Turgenev were chosen as models and George Moore and Henry James came to be regarded as the first of the recognised masters of fiction criticism in England. They drew upon the great tradition of the English novel and they also assimilated French and other Continental influences. From their cogitations and discussions what resulted was the "New Novel", as distinct from the typical Victorian novel, in theme and in treatment. Thus by the year 1880, the demands on the novel, in so far as they were made by serious critics, were crystallised. The novel was to be a work of art, seeking to attain to the condition of poetry, music, painting and sculpture. The novel, as these critics observed, must have a serious moral function and must 'deepen, extend, and refine experience'.

The object of the present study is to trace the theory of Impressionism in the English novel over the wider and in many ways interesting period of 1880 to 1914. The writers who appear in these pages may all in some way be called Impressionists. In modern fiction criticism "impressionism" is used as a convenient term to distinguish between late Victorian aesthetics of the novel and early twentieth century theories of fiction. Owing to their preoccupation with

technique and craftsmanship, the Impressionists, in their critical pronouncements, talk more about "scene", "panorama", "Spectacle", "point of view" and "central intelligence" than repeat the old antinomy between the Novel of Plot and the Novel of Character and the various conventional problems of narrative method. The point of view orders the structure of the new novel and substitutes a central intelligence for the old repertorial omniscience. The best of the Impressionists also understand the technical necessity for restraint and discrimination in the plunge within and below consciousness. Thus the period under review not only marks the transition from the conventional to the modern novel but also highlights some major achievements in the theory of fiction. For this study of the theory of Impressionism in the English novel I have restricted myself to the critical writings of Hardy, James, Conrad and Ford Madox Ford who may be regarded as pioneers and chief exponents of this cult. Thomas Hardy has been brought for discussion not so much as a theorist but as a great master of fiction whose statements have a bearing on certain aspects of the modern novel. Through the critical as well as creative writings of these masters, the artistic and

moral respectability of the novel is fairly established. Most of all they plead for the aesthetic status of the novel, describing its history and its categories, correlating it with painting, sculpture, music and other fine arts and enunciating its laws.

The material for this study is drawn primarily from the critical writings of the novelists themselves. I have tried to explore and study all the published materials comprising their letters, diaries, journals, essays, reviews, notes and memoires before advancing any point of view of my own. I have also deduced certain conclusions from their imaginative writings because in the case of such writers some of their artistic canons are best revealed in their creative works. In a way they supplement and enrich each other. Generous use has also been made of the formal criticism of these writers for the assessment of their theory and for establishing comparisons with contemporaries. It is the attempt of the present writer to study the theory and principle of the above novelists in relation to their art and develop an aesthetics of their craftsmanship so as to distinguish them not only from the Mid-Victorian but also from the later

Impressionists and the Stream of consciousness school of fiction. The Introduction (Chapter I) focusses attention on the new dimensions of the impressionistic novel and highlights in broad terms its structure and aesthetics. Chapters II to V are meant as intensive study of the theory of the novelists — Hardy, James, Conrad and Ford —in the chronological order. In these chapters an attempt has been made to classify the theories under different heads in respect of themes and craftsmanship and also to view these cogitations in the light of contemporary criticism wherever necessary. Special care has been taken to define specific phases in the novelists career so as to distinguish casual remarks from serious utterances and earlier cogitations from later and maturer deliberations. The concluding chapter, apart from giving the literary background of English impressionism, sums up in retrospect important aspects of the fictional theories enunciated by the Impressionists.

Although critics have paid attention to the study of the novelists under review individually, there has not as yet appeared any study which places them in the wider perspective of late Victorian and early twentieth century

criticism of the novel. The present study may, to some extent help in better understanding of the novelists under review and, perhaps, also in the appreciation of their art in correlation to their theory. It is hoped that from this study will emerge an impression not only of the scope and novelty of the criticism of the impressionistic novel but of certain distinct traits which developing through time later culminate in the theories of Lawrence, Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

INTRODUCTION

I) It is perhaps an adequate summary of the Impressionist movement to say that it held a prism up to nature .... (Thus) painting became, not a copy of nature, but a trick whereby the general effect of nature was represented.
(Herbert Read : "The Impressionists" in The Meaning of Art 1931)

II) Before all to open our eyes to seeing the distinctive trait, to accustom our hands to rendering this primal aspect of things for the eyes of others ... that is the first point.
(Ferdinand Brunetiere : "Impressionisme dans la roman" in La Roman Naturaliste, 1893)

Chapter One

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The emergence of the Impressionist novelists on the literary scene marks the advent of a new phase in the history of the English novel. By the year 1880 Moore and Gissing as well as Hardy and James had set the pace for the new critical awareness by their cogitations and their own creative impulse. Hardy incorporated in his works some of the Victorian characteristics as a novelist but in his criticism (which though scant, is brilliantly suggestive) one can notice the direction in which English novel was moving. During the 'nineties the moral respectability of novel reading is fairly assured in spite of continuing traces of doubt, and argument over the novel's general position now centres round its claims to offer more than relaxation. The aesthetic status of the novel was also slowly changing through the attempts of critics to define it vis-a-vis other arts, to describe its history and its categories and to enunciate its own laws. The new preoccupation with craftsmanship and the artistic conscience is the final factor in a status for the novel that remains predominant in the nineties and even in the first few decades of the present century.

Although the last quarter of the nineteenth century shows the continuation of certain mid-Victorian critical tenets

of Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot, it also marks the advent of James, the growth of psychological analysis, the attack on Grundyism, the rise of neo-romance and ends with the new luminaries like Conrad, Wells, Bennett and Ford Madox Ford on the literary horizon and the promise of further controversies to come. This period has always been recognised as witnessing the disintegration of Victorianism in the literary as well as other spheres, and accordingly, the criticism of fiction is found to reflect both the exploratiyeness and the conservatism usually characteristic of an age of transition.

The flux in the critical theory of the novel may in general be attributed to the influence of French masters, the maturity of the English novel criticism itself, the impact of psychology and the inter-disciplinary studies.

The novel in France and England developed and flourished strictly on national lines. The novelists had to keep in view the taste and sensibility of their readers and their moral vision. To over-simplify the issue, the French novelists were more candid in their moral and philosophical attitudes and more self-conscious in the technical preciseness of the written words. On the contrary, the English novelists

conformed to the middle class morality and wrote their novels with "inspiration" as their sole guide. But by the 'eighties the influence of Flaubert, Maupassant and Anatole France began to be felt in the English novel. George Moore led the attack not only on the restrictions of Grundyism but on what he saw as the mindless superficiality of the English novel, its neglect of psychological depth and its concern for the "mere appearance of life".[1] Moore is typical of those in the last two decades of the century who found in the French and the Russian novel the seriousness and intellectual self-respect which they wished to bring to their own art. The "artistic conscience" became a rallying cry. George Gissing exhorted his fellow-writers, in 1884, to free the novel from the stranglehold of popular demand and the prudery of the circulating library :

> English novels are miserable stuff for a very miserable reason, simply because English novelists fear to do their best lest they should damage their popularity, and consequently their income.... Let novelists be true to their artistic conscience, and the public taste will come round. 2

Under the influence of Flaubert, Henry James ridiculed the English novelists (particularly the popular novelists — Anthony Trollope, Thackeray and Mrs. Gaskell) for their

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1. "Since the Elizabethans", Cosmopolis, IV, (1896), pp. 42-58
2. "The New Censorship of Literature", letter to Pall Mall Gazette (December 15, 1884), p. 2

irresponsibility in design and craftsmanship; Conrad complained that the Englishman did not take novel-writing as seriously as 'colonisation' in far-off lands; Ford Madox Ford vehemently criticised 'looseness' of the English novel and the prudery of their writers.

Although James is a pioneer in arousing the critical self-consciousness among English novelists, he should be classed with the group of the novelists who were later dubbed as the "Impressionists". James, Conrad and Ford Madox Ford form the trio of highly sophisticated and self-conscious artists who not only revolutionized English fiction criticism but also left their permanent imprint on successive generations. James as the elder member of the league read extensively and wrote with characteristic American gusto about the art of fiction. During his stay in Paris he had come to know Flaubert and Turgenev whose example he emulated both in theory and practice. The subjective drama, objectivity in novel, presentation of life through the consciousness of a single character, the need for economy, restraint and discrimination in the use of language, were some of the traits which he learned and assimilated. Not that these characteristics were extinct in contemporary English and American fiction, but James felt inspired under the French influence to

highlight them. Conrad who regarded James as "chér maitre", at least in theory, found him the apostle of the new creed. He also sought inspiration from the same sources and pleaded for the impressionistic style in novel-writing. His essays on Maupassant and Anatole France and his references to Victor Hugo and Flaubert amply show his devotion to the French masters. Ford Madox/ Ford, a younger contemporary of Conrad and a disciple of Henry James, further enlarged the French heritage. During his collaboration with Conrad in the first decade of the present century he showed great keenness on writing novels on the model of French artists. Later he developed his own theory of impressionism, progression d'effet , écriture ideale and other refinements in the craft of fiction.

The influence of French writers and their critical theory did have its impact on the mind of English writers. But to over-emphasize this influence would be tantamount to conceding them all innovations in the technique of novel writing. The other side of the picture is equally important. The new direction in the English novel is preceptible even in the 'sixties and 'seventies of the last century. Dickens and George Eliot showed great interest in the craft of fiction. Even before them Jane Austen had proved to be a discriminating

and self-conscious artist. This means that by the year 1880 the English novel had already reached a stage of maturity when we could anticipate some of the French innovations even without direct borrowings. George Eliot and Thomas Hardy show perfect awareness of the technical problems and seem to be conscious of the role of the new form which could be exploited for education and edification.

The trio — Gissing , Moore and Stevenson —represents a well-known extreme of that pre-occupation with the craft of fiction which followed in the 'eighties and 'nineties. On the model of Flaubert, each was a self-conscious martyr to the technique of his art. Moore's endless re-writing in the quest for verbal prefection became legendary,[3] and Gissing who compared the freedom of Dickens and Scott with the exacting standards of his own day, gave ample testimony, through his letters and diary, of his devotion to the goddess. The agonies of creative writing in the case of Stevenson emphasize even more clearly how, for these writers, craft in the novel had taken on the aspect of a religious faith. The utilitarian defence of art was never completely out of Stevenson's mind, but it was much more by this insistence on matters of form that

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3. See, e.g., M. Brown, George Moore, Seattle; 1955, pp. 44-45

he justified his own high concept of his art, recommending, as the ideal towards which the novelist must strive, "those more exquisite requirements of proficiency and finish ... for which, day after day, he recasts and revises and rejects."[4]

James, Conrad and Ford were not only interested in the artistic innovations of the French masters but were also keen students of the English novel and they imbibed the critical spirit of the native writers with equal gusto. It was precisely because of this dual influence that they successfully adopted French and English tenets in their theories and also in their creative writings.

The study of psychology and the principles of human behaviour also helped the critic to understand and analyse human motives and impulses. William James taught his younger brother, Henry James, the value and significance of 'consciousness', 'inner state' and 'subjective drama'. Later Freud and his theories supplied good clues to the novelist to probe the human mind. Not only new terms were added to the vocabulary of fiction critics but their application also opened new vistas in the craft of fiction. Such terms as 'consciousness', 'intelligence', 'perception', 'reflection', 'memory', 'association'

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4. "Letter to a young Gentleman" in Across the Plains, 1892, pp. 272-88

'imagination' became current with the critics of fiction. Some of these words which were known before were now used more precisely as their connotation was made abundantly clear. Psychology also helped the artists to develop, the technique of dialogue in a better way. 'Monologue interior ' was first of all introduced by the French writer Eduard Jouardin who paved the way for the stream of consciousness technique of the novel. James and Conrad consequently became artists of subjective drama in their fiction.

Henry James was perhaps the first English critic who thought not only of the comprehensive nature of the novel but also tried to equate it with other fine arts like poetry, music, painting and sculpture. In the "Art of Fiction" he pleaded that the novelist should try to give the novel something of the lyricism, cadence, perspective and harmony of other arts. Hardy spoke equally enthusiastically of the interrelation of novel and painting and architecture. Conrad echoed his predecessors in the preface to <u>The Nigger of the Narcissus</u> : "It (novel) must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music — which is the art of arts". Ford Madox Ford indefatigably talked of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Impressionists in his

discussions and cogitations about the art of the novel. Thus gradually there developed a school of critics who made attempts to raise fiction criticism to the status of poetry criticism and drama criticism. To write fiction criticism was the sacred office of the novelist and critics and this could eventually give it a place in the history of aesthetic theory.

II

The Nature of the New Novel :

As discussed above, fiction criticism in England reached a new phase of its development in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The critical theory of the period shows more subtleties, sophistication and keen perception of the moral, philosophical as well as technical problems. The weltanschauung of the new artists is more limited but more discriminate than that of the Victorians. They evince new awareness in their understanding of the problems and pursue indefatigably their codes of fiction at which they arrive after great soul-searching and aesthetic meditation.

As far as the philosophical aspects of the novel are concerned these new artists belong to the great tradition of

the late Victorian phase. They continue to take as much of interest in romance and the marvellous as their predecessors ; their passion for realism is patent and none too different; they continue with some of the novel ideas of the Victorian novelist. But their cogitations resulting in the cross-fertilisation of views lead to new dimensions. They seem to bring about a metamorphasis in the very nature of the novel by inter-mixing realism and romance; they are less concerned with social phenomenon as with the "individual"; they seldom draw a line of demarcation between moral and immoral, between pessimism and optimism. All these elements seem to have been woven into the texture of life. Further, they attempt to bring their theory of art nearer to what may be termed "neo-humanism" which, they pleaded, artists should pursue. Above all, they are set on discarding most of the conventional techniques of fiction and exhort for the adoption of new methods for the treatment of the "new vision". Though they lack the encyclopeadic range of the Victorians and develop their works along individualised and highly sophisticated characters, there is some compensation for this innovation. The inner history of man, his moral and intellectual struggle with himself, his sense of isolation, and his consciousness of the new kind of "determinism" born out of

the mal du siecle is quite characteristic. Thus there is a definite shift in these novelist's creative writings from "without" to "within"; and their criticism of the novel only conforms and elaborates this belief. The division of society into what David Daiches calls "the public" and "private" sector is quite evident. Some of these fundamental issues concerning the nature of the new novel may be discussed with special reference to the contributions made by the Impressionists.

(i) The Novel as Romance :

Although the marvellous and the uncommon have always been important ingredients of fiction, their predominance in a work of art decides its ultimate nature and quality. In poetry we have Coleridge's famous dictum of "willing suspension of belief" which helps enjoyment of the marvellous and the supernatural; in fiction although novelists from Richardson to Conrad have concerned themselves with copying Nature or with ideal values of life, they have not entirely rejected the "uncommon" from their creative works. The romantic spirit not only enchants the mind but also exalts the soul. It is in Hardy's famous statement "the real, if unavowed, purpose of fiction is to give pleasure by gratifying the love of the

uncommon in human experience, mental or corporeal", that we find the clue to the novelist's realization of the value of the marvellous and the necessity of maintaining verisimilitude and consistency in his character's behaviour.

Many modern novelists other than the writers of gothic romances came to feel that the best means of reconciling 'the uncommon and the ordinary' was to set their stories in the past. Novelists who do not write about the past but are nevertheless haunted by it often 'mingle the marvellous' in their stories by introducing elements of fantasy and the supernatural. Henry James, whose novels and stories are filled with his 'sense of the past' encourages his imagination to conjure up ghosts and presences, believing that these best serve the story-tellers fundamental appeal to wonder.[5] When James's novels are not dealing directly with the supernatural, they still reverberate with overtones of fantasy.

Conrad has often referred to the element of romance and the marvellous as an essential ingredient of a good work of fiction. In his essay on John Galsworthy (1906) he characteristically remarked :

> ... the fairy-tale, be it not ungratefully said, has walked the earth in many unchallenged disguises,

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5. Henry James, Preface to The American in The Art of the Novel, pp. 30 ff.
Preface to The Altar of the Dead, Ibid., pp. 252-53
See M. Allott, Novelists on the Novel, p. 5

> and lingers amongst us to this day wearing, sometimes, amazingly heavy clothes. It lingers; and even it lingers with some assurance. Mankind has come of age, but the successive generation still demand artlessly to be amazed, moved and amused. Certain forms of innocent fun will never grow old, I suppose. But the secret of the long life of the fairy tale consists mainly in this, I suspect: that it is amusing to the writer thereof. Whatever public wants it supplies, it ministers first of all to his vanity in an intimate and delightful way. The pride of fanciful invention; the pride of that invention which soars (on gooses' wings) into the empty blue is like the intoxication of an elixir sent by the gods above ... This is why the fairy-tale, in its various disguises of optimism, pessimism, romanticism and what not, will always be with us. 6

Conrad acknowledges the need for "romance" and the fairy-tale touch as exhilarating to the writer and satisfying to the reader and he believes that despite innovations in the technique of fiction, this element will linger on with "some assurance". Conrad recognizes a double allegiance to 'the uncommon' and 'the ordinary' by calling himself "a romantic realist".[7] Although both he and James agree that what is remote and unfamiliar is not necessarily wonderful in itself, his stories of the sea and of distant continents derive some of their power from the sense of the supernatural which they evoke.

The marvellous forms an important ingredient in the

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6. Joseph Conrad, Tales of Hearsay and Last Essays (London, 1955 ed.) "John Galsworthy (125-131)", p. 126

7. Joseph Conrad, Preface to Within the Tides (1915)

novels of the Impressionist novelists because they believe that the uncommon and the supernatural are part of our common heritage. Their treatment of the fantasy, is, however, different from those of mere romance writers. In their works such elements evoke mysterious feelings and also enlarge our capacity to appreciate their human value.

(ii) The Novel As a Portrait of Life :

The novelist's urge to copy nature, present manners or render a slice of life emanates from his desire to make us believe in the probability of his characters and events. Truth and verisimilitude not only form essential ingredients of fiction but have been given new meaning by successive generations of writers. English novelists during the past centuries have adopted different techniques to express their own vision of reality. It is also true that almost every technique which the novelist uses has behind it the intentions of reality and truth. The autobiographical memoir, the epistolary method, the stream of consciousness technique and similar other methods are all designed to heighten the desired effect of authenticity and verisimilitude.

The writers of "social realism", however, went to the

other extreme. Their craze for minutae and documentation was responsible for certain misconceptions about the nature of 'realism', in particular the notion that by "realism" is meant an exclusive concern with 'low' subjects. It was in France that writers were to allow this new range of subject-matter to lead them to some damaging theories about the function of the novel. Among Russian novelists Tolstoy ridiculed "the total recall of the appearances faces, garments, sounds, apartments of the acting persons." [8] Dostoevosky showed a similar attitude : "Arid observation of everyday trivialities I have long since ceased to regard as realism." [9] Instead, he tried to present situations which have the inmost essence of truth. A similar enlarging effect is obtained in the novels of Hardy, James, Conrad and E.M. Foster, where, at certain moments, things perceived are given a special significance which transforms them into symbols of universal value.

The Impressionists in English fiction — James, Conrad, Ford Madox Ford and later D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf — all plead for a kind of imaginative realism in fiction. Even before the advent of these writers, one can find echoes of the great Romantic poets in the critical utterances of some of the

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8. Leo Tolstoy, What is Art ? (1897), Novelists on the Novel, p.74
9. Dostoevoskys' letter to Nikolay Strachov (26 Feb., 1869) Novelists on the Novel, p. 68

novelists. Hardy, for example, stresses the impossibility of recording "the whole truth".[10] The "truth" that the artist extracts from a scene turns out to be only the truth of the impression that the scene makes upon him. As the artist works upon his impressions of reality, shaping them into some tangible piece of art, he must ever fall short of reproducing them as they originally existed in his perceptions. In one of his illuminating passages in "The Profitable Reading of Fiction", Hardy defines his attitude towards "imaginative truth" and "realistic truth". He maintains that what the Realists are faithful to is "life garniture and not life"[11] and condemns realism as "an unfortunate and ambiguous word". Elsewhere he calls for the exercise of "the Daedalian faculty for selection and cunning mainpulation"[12] rather than hankering after naturalistic detail.

'Life is all inclusion and confusion', says Henry James, and art 'all discrimination and selection.'[13] In his critical writings James constantly welcomes "exactness — truth of detail", "saturation", "specification" in Balzac and Flaubert. But this insistence upon the reference of art to reality should

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10. Letter to Mary Hardy, dated 19 Dec. 1863
Early Life of Thomas Hardy, ed. F.E.Hardy(London, 1933)ed.)
p. 46
11. Life and Art, ed. Earnest Brennecke Jr.(New York, 1925),p.66
12. Ibid., "The Science of Fiction", p. 88 ff.
13. Preface to The Spoils of Poynton in The Art of the Novel,p.120

not mean that he was on the side of realists. He does not consider art as a mirror or photographic representation of an amorphous slice of life. In his Preface to The Ambassadors, he defined the scope of art: "Art deals with what we see, it must first contribute full-handed that ingredient; it plucks its material, otherwise expressed, in the garden of life —— which material elsewhere grown is stale and uneatable.[14] The subject of art is life, or more particularly someone's apprehension of the experience of it, and in striving truly to represent it, art removed the waste and muddlement in which it is lived and gives it a lucid and intelligible form.

'Liberty of the imagination should be the artist's most precious possession' maintains Conrad, indignantly repudiating the human perverseness which discovers in the free work of great artists 'the faltering dogmas of some romantic, realistic or naturalistic creed'.[15] In one of his letters to Arnold Bennett, Conrad candidly remarked: "... realism in art will never approach reality".[16] Realists, according to Conrad, at their best, could be historians, reporters, flat artists; they could never dream of being poets, prophets and men of vision.

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14. The Art of the Novel, p. 312
15. Joseph Conrad, Life and Letters, p. 9
16. Life and Letters I, ed. G.Jean-Aubry, pp. 302-303

(iii) The Novel as Impression of Life :

One of the important aspects of modern fiction criticism is the view that a novel should deal neither with the 'romance' of life nor exclusively with photographic portrayal of life. Instead, it should 'render' an impression of life. This theory became very common with the French writers of the later nineteenth century. As a pioneering effort Ferdinand Brunetiere's "Impressionism in the Novel" (1879) deserves special mention. Discussing impressionism in relation to novel he maintained : "Before all to open our eyes to seeing the distinctive trait, to accustom our hands to rendering this primal aspect of things for the eyes of others ... that is the first point".[17] English novelists and theorists obviously sought inspiration from French writers in the elucidation of the concept of impressionism in the novel. The influence of French impressionist painters on their literary counterparts is quite obvious in both the countries. Herbert Read in his book The Meaning of Art says :

> It is perhaps an adequate summary of the Impressionist movement to say that it held a prism up to nature. Beginning with Leonardo, a tradition had grown up in Europe whereby the plasticity of an

17. "Impressionisme dans la roman" in Le Roman Naturaliste (Paris, 1893) Quoted by E.K. Hay in "Joseph Conrad and Impressionism" in The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism XXXIV (Winter 1975) pp. 137-44

> object, its depth or tri-dimensionality, was rendered by gradations of shade, ... Painting became, not a copy of nature, but a trick whereby the general effect of nature was represented. 18

The passage quoted above helps us understand the genesis of the new and suggestive phrase 'impressionism' in modern fiction criticism. Whereas the traditional artists held "a mirror up to nature", the moderns took it upon themselves to hold in their creative writings "a prism upto nature". Acutely conscious of the complexity of modern life, they thought that life could not be fully represented without viewing it from different angles of vision. Flaubert was perhaps the first great Impressionist writer who in his Madame Bovary presented middle-class French life through the impressions and consciousness of different characters.

Henry James in his essay "The Art of Fiction" (1884) offers a plea for the Impressionist view of the novel by maintaining that the novel is a sister art with 'painting', because both attempt to represent life in a unique way. The analogy between the art of the painter and that of the novelist seemed 'complete' to James's vision : "Their inspiration is the same, their process (allowing for the different quality of the

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18. Herbert Read, The Meaning of Art (Pelican, 1959 ed.) pp. 139-40

vehicle), is the same, their success is the same".[19] In the same essay he stated the oft-quoted sentence :

> A novel is, in its broadest definition, a personal, a direct impression of life. 20

James considered the world of art to be the grand-total of the impressions of different artists. Every artist looks at life and is imbued with a distinct and individual impression. Thus life in its complexity and variety offers scope for all those endowed with keen sensibility and creative imagination. He makes this point abundantly clear in his Preface to The Portrait of a Lady where he speaks of "the house of fiction" having not one but a million windows, which needs to be "pierced" by "the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will".[21] James was thus extending to fiction criticism the views that had already been propounded by the Romantic poets and the literary critics of the early nineteenth century.

Thomas Hardy, though not a theoretic enthusiast like James, also believed in the Impressionist view of life. In his journal of June 1877, he wrote :

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19. The House of Fiction, ed. Leon Edel (London, 1962), p. 25
20. Ibid., p. 29
21. The Art of the Novel, ed. R.P. Blackmur (London, 1962),p.46

> There is enough poetry in what is left (in life), after all the false romance has been abstracted, to make a sweet pattern ... I think the art lies in making these defects the basis of a hitherto unperceived beauty, by irradiating them with 'the light that never was' on their surface, but is seen to be latent in them by the spiritual eye. 22

Hardy uses a conventional phrase to suggest the same views which later James, Conrad and Ford Madox Ford discussed in detail. He believes that certain aspects of nature cannot be portrayed unless one adopts the "spiritual eye". Again, in his preface to Tess of the D'urbervilles he declared :

> ... Let me repeat that a novel is an impression, not an argument. 23

Hardy knew the French Impressionists, Courbet and Manet, and as a designer he also understood the value of the Impressionist technique in art; but he developed this view intuitively and imaginatively. He did not belong to the school of Henry James. However, both Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford sought inspiration from the "master" and their cogitations very often echo James's pronouncements.

Conrad came to be acquainted with Ford Madox Ford early in 1898 when on the insistence of Henley he invited him to collaborate. At once they recognised in each other like minds,

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22. Early Life of Thomas Hardy, ed. F.E. Hardy (London, 1928), p. 151
23. Preface to Tess of the D'urbeville (1892).

and talked and talked about the art of the novel. Their acute consciousness of basic defects of the English novel led them to champion the cause of 'impressionism'. Like the Pre-Raphaelites in the later half of the nineteenth century, they were revolting against typical and standardized art-forms. They agreed that the general effect of a novel must be the general effect that life makes on mankind. Life imposes a series of impressions on the brain but the impressions are not an orderly progression. They are a confused mass. So the novel that truly reflects life will not be a continuous and logical narration but a stringing together of impressions.

Joseph Conrad's entire theory of objectivity — the particular image, scene, or extended visual impression suggesting circumstances beyond — is in direct line of the Impressionists, notably Flaubert and Henry James. In his letters and critical essays, he has referred to the techniques of impressionism and speaks eloquently in their defence. His preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus may be taken as a landmark in the development of his theory of fiction. Conrad's emphasis on personal vision and the impressionistic technique remained his guiding principle throughout his literary career. Ford Madox Ford, however, wrote extensively on the cult of

impressionism and became an ardent champion of "the new novel".

The central problem of the impressionist novelist , as Ford conceived it, lies in the "form" of his novels which must give the effect of formlessness and frequentary nature of life as it meets the individual consciousness. The impressionist group of novelists with their background of French Realists and English Pre-Raphaelite painters, adhered to the central principle of impressionist-realist technique : the rendering rather than the relating of events in order to achieve an illusion of reality. Ford defined it as the "reproduction of one art or another of the impressions made upon one by one's observation".[24] Like Flaubert and Henry James, Ford believed that the author should present life as he views it but at the same time be detached. He must avoid poetic moods when "the desire to preach takes command".[25]

It should, however, be conceded that impressionism meant different things to different novelists. To Hardy and Henry James it suggested personal vision , the writer's personal observation and imaginative grasp of reality. To Conrad and Ford, it meant something more : it suggested a new

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24. Great Trade Route (New York, 1937), p. 32
25. Thus to Revisit (London, 1921), pp.211-12

way to render the complexity of life. But it was given to the novelists of post-World-War I era to develop a more definite theory of impression in fiction. The stream of consciousness writers feel urged to make their narrative a convenient stringing together of impressions and memories. Thus Virginia Woolf wrote in her essay "Modern Fiction" :

> The mind receives a myriad impressions — trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, not tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style ... Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semitransparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever abberation or complexity it may display with a little mixture of the alien and external as possible ? 26

Virginia Woolf and her confreres pushed impressionism to the other pole so that the novelist was left only with the choice of recording the impressions of an individual moving in a

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26. Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader, First series, (London, 1945 ed.), p. 189

rarefied atmosphere. But the impressionism of James, Conrad and Ford does not allow them to seek escape in their character's train of thought. As matter of fact they plead for a true balance between the external and the internal and their theories are corroborated by their own practice. It might be said that they stand between the traditional Victorian masters and the ultra-modern stream of consciousness novelists and are as much concerned with "life" as with "living".

III

The Ethics of the Novel

Whether the novelist chooses to romanticize life or to idealise it, whether he presents nature 'red in tooth and claw' or renders it garnished with 'everyday trivialities', the moral purpose invariably plays an important part in his work. When the anxiety to teach urges the preacher to take over from the artist, the novel suffers as a work of art. But in the case of great masters, the novel is neither sermons nor just criticism and satire. It incorporates an extensive vision of his life. Hence natural truth is better than didacticism. The English novel suffered acutely in the past from the didactic zeal of the middle classes and the exploitation of this weakness by the

writers of the 'nuvvle'. It is only with the emergence of the Impressionists —— Hardy, James, Conrad and Ford Madox Ford —— that the question of the ethics of the novel is posed more subtly.

The Victorian novelists were acutely conscious of the moral feelings and sensibilities of their readers. Hence in spite of their efforts to rid their art of any kind of exhortation or preaching they ended by providing "the pill" sugar-coated with "amusement". To turn from the mid-nineteenth century English novel to the French or Russian novel of the same period is to enter a world which may be less rich in invention but is certainly governed by a more sensible conception of the utile. As their contributions in 'The Ethics of the Novel' reveal, English novelists of the late nineteenth century are only too conscious of this shortcoming in their predecessors. Envious of the freedom of their fellow-writers abroad and anxious for the dignity and integrity of their own art, their pleading sometimes betrays a note of desperation. In 1881 we find Stevenson urging that 'it must always be foul to tell what is false; and it can never be safe to suppress what is true'.[27] Seven years later in 1888, Hardy re-states the case in

27. R.L. Stevenson, "The Morality of the Profession of Letters" (1881), See, Novelists on the Novel, p. 98

his essay "The Profitable Reading of Fiction", arguing that novels 'without a moral purpose' are more valuable in the end because the didactic novel is generally so devoid Vraisemblance as to teach nothing but the impossibility of tampering with natural truth to advance dogmatic opinion'.[28] In the same essay he asserts: 'Whether we hold the arts which depict mankind to be, in the words of Mr Matthew Arnold, a criticism of life, or, in those of Mr Addington Symonds, a revelation of life, the material remains the same, with its sublimities, its beauties, its ugliness, as the case may be.'[29] It is this broadening of the vision which allows the artist to look into the darker and uglier side of life and to depict the moral as well as the immoral, howsoever shocking it might be to the reading public. Hardy, it may be conceded, believed in the ethical value of art but he had his own ways of presenting it. Lionel Johnson aptly remarked that Hardy used, in the English way, powers with many likenesses to the French genius of his time.

Looking back to the Eighteen-eighties from the first decade of the twentieth century, Henry James remembered that even then only questions which mattered to him in considering

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28. Life & Art, ed. Earnest Brennecke Jr. (New York, 1925) "The Profitable Reading of Fiction", p. 66
29. "The Profitable Reading of Fiction", p. 61

the moral significance of a work of art were, "Is it valid ... is it genuine, is it sincere, the result of some direct impression or perception of life".[30] Henry James described his own writing of fiction as an "act of life" and his terms suggest the important truth that the creative process is not only continuous with every/day experience, but is a particularly meaningful and deeply felt kind of experience, with roots that extend far out into society, both present and past. Art, he insisted, should multiply our relations with life, and he believed artists must draw their inspiration from their experience. James recognized that there was considerable worth attached to the incidental contributions art could make to society. But its greatest value for society was that it could offer aesthetic experience of a kind more meaningful to the mind and spirit of man than all but a very few experience encountered in the usual life-time.

The intense seriousness with which these later novelists sometimes discuss their art may take us by surprise. Conrad, for example, tells us that the artist must make 'many acts of faith', the greatest being 'the cherishing of undying hope, which involves' all the piety of effort and renunciation.[31]

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30. Preface to The Portrait of a Lady, in The Art of the Novel, p. 45

31. Joseph Conrad, Life & Letters, "Books" (1905), pp. 11-12

Conrad makes his "moral view" abundantly clear in one of his letters to Arthur Symon wherein he wrote :

> One thing that I am certain of is that I have approached the object of my task, things human, in a spirit of piety. 32

Conrad's essays on the French novelists corrobarate this view. He shares with Anatole France and Maupassant "the hopeful illusion" which should be the forte of all creative writers. Like them he is also an analyst of "human illusions".

We find the same note of new morality in the critical writings of Ford Madox Ford. His heritage of the Pre-Raphaelite poets and his deep study of the French novelists coupled with his association with Henry James and Conrad finally proved decisive. Almost from the very beginning of his literary career Ford showed consciousness of the civilising value of art in society. In his essay "On the Functions of the Art in the Republic", he pleaded for the inclusion of "truths" which were shocking to the sensibilities of his contemporaries.[33] Elsewhere he wrote :

> The province of art ... is the bringing of humanity into contact, person with person ... But the business of the artist is to awaken

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32. Life & Letters II ed. G. Jean-Aubry, pp. 83-84

33. The Critical Attitude (London, 1911), pp. 26 ff.

thought in the unthinking.

> To this wideness of appeal, to this largeness of sympathy, the especialist can never hope to attain. He addresses himself to an aristocracy, since he addressed himself to be instructed. The province of art is to appeal, to solace, the humble ... 34

An assertion of this kind is unlikely to appear in fiction criticism much before the end of the nineteenth century, although signs of a similar mood are implicit earlier in the sensitive utterances of such artists as Flaubert and Turgenev. We are particularly aware of it in the novels of Hardy, James and Conrad, when it is associated with a vivid sense of hostile or evil forces at work in the world. It is as if in James's invocation to his muse and in Conrad's description of 'wrestling with the Lord' about Nostromo, we hear mysterious chants from high priests of literature signifying their dedication to their craft and justifying their new creed to resist external moral views by insisting on their own view of art and morality.

IV

Technique of the New Novel

For all their concern with "matter" in their creative works, the modern novelist's preoccupation with "manner" cannot be

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34. The Critical Attitude (London, 1911), pp. 64-65

lost sight of. 'Il ya tojours la maniere' Conrad asserted in his A Personal Record. There is no denying the fact that we have some of the most perceptive statements of novelists on matters of technique and crafts-manship. Whether they are concerned with narrative structure, point of view, characterisation or style, they have always something illuminating to say on one or the other aspect of the novel.

The preoccupation of the novelists of eighteen-nineties with technical problems can be viewed as the beginning of the phase in English novel when 'form' and 'craftsmanship' was to have an edge over 'matter' and 'philosophy'. J.W. Beach thinks that the most important characteristic of the modern novelists beginning with James and Conrad is their conscious effort to disappear from their pages.[35] In Fielding and Scott, in Thackeray and George Eliot, the author is everywhere present in person to see that one is properly informed on all the circumstances of the action. As against their Victorian predecessors, James and Conrad represent the modern tendency in a very remarkable way. In their novels one notices the exit of the author resulting in the disappearance of humour, irony and the prophylectic salt to common sense. And yet these writers

35. J.W. Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 14

are quite characteristic of our time. They make a sincere effort to present a phase of truth in which the Victorians did not interest themselves. This is the constant occupation of the modern writers of fiction, more specially of the Impressionists, to render the very feel and texture of experience, not merely erotic, but of all experience that comes within the compass of the author's subject.

The modern writers not only practise but also plead for the "Well-made Novel" in their critical writings. As they view it, both romance and realism have made their contributions to the ideal of the well-made novel, though neither the writer of romance nor the realist is necessarily bound to that ideal. The realist is concerned to give a serious picture of life and he may be so dominated by his love of detail that he may largely neglect to make his story shapely or even telling. The romancer may lose himself in mysteries, in exciting adventure, in the complications of the plot, and leave the design to take care of itself. But when the writer of romance begins to consider the means by which he can produce illusion, maintain suspense and lead the reader on by due degrees from one level of curiosity to another, when he begins to ask himself how an improbable story can be made to seem as real as every-day life, he has

started in the path of the well-made novel. And when the realist is concerned more for the choice and relevance of detail than for the mere assembling of them, when he begins to consider his story in the light of a subject which gives pattern and significance to his material, then he is moving in the direction of the well-made novel. The conscious efforts of James, Conrad and Ford Madox Ford who harmonise romance and realism and present life impressionistically, show much discrimination and selection in the handling of materials. Their use of the various techniques of objectivity helps them realise the goal of the well-made novel. In general the new features of their techniques are expressions of what is called 'impressionistic' as opposed to the classic spirit in art. In James there is evident a regularity of form but in many of Conrad's works there appears a freakish changefulness and unpredictability. Instead of uniformity and simplicity, they tend to diversity and complexity. Instead of continuity of action, they show a tendency to discontinuity. Conrad gives the impression that the sense of life is often best rendered by an abrupt passing from one series of events, one group of characters, one centre of consciousness, to another.

The complexity in the novels of James, Conrad and Ford Madox Ford often reflects an amalgam of diverse tendencies in modern English fiction. That they were devoted students of French fiction and were acutely conscious of the defective designing of the English novel, are the significant factors which led them to make bold experiements in the craft of fiction. Their cogitations and statements, scattered throughout the whole range of their letters, journals, memoires and essays, amply show that they were tireless experimenters and that to present life with a personal bias ('impression'), they adopted different attitudes. We shall consider some of these problems of technique as under :

(i) Structure of the Novel :

Until late nineteenth century we find critics of novel focus their attention on well-known aspects of the novel : plot, characterisation, style etc. Their criteria of judgement were derived partly from neo-classical canons of verisimilitude and decorum in content and partly from the common urge for intelligibility and correctness in style. The modern phase is well brought out in impressionistic criticism which emphasizes the aesthetic value of technical devices in bringing art nearer to life.

It has been the privilege of a new class of writers to stimulate critical awareness of the technique of fiction. Among the earliest of these are Sir Percy Lubbock whose The Craft of Fiction (1921) and E.M. Forster, whose Aspects of the Novel (1927) break new ground in fiction criticism. Before these critical developments took place, the conscious craftsman had long cried in wilderness for some acknowledgement that his works might be skillfully unified structures. Regarding the problem of structure Dr. Miriam Allott maintains that by the time of James it became apparent that, according to his subject, method and point of attack, the novelist tended to produce one or other of four types of structure :

a) As a commentator on the broad tendencies and attitudes of a society or an age, the novelist appears as the 'inclusive' panoramic author, whose portrait of life employs comedy, irony and satire as the instruments of its critical strategy.

b) As the analyst of individual feelings and emotions, the novelist appears as the sensitive 'exclusive' artist whose interpretation of life, especially in its exploration of hidden human conflict, is disciplined by a profounder irony and sometimes illuminates the nature of tragic experience.

c) As 'sage' or 'prophet' the novelist tends to combine the inclusive writers uneconomical prodigality and the exclusive writer's feeling for pattern. In the 'sage' — George Eliot or Tolstoy, for example — it is primarily an intellectual logic which shapes the pattern. Here again a certain strenousness of critical response is demanded.

d) For the novelist as 'prophet' — Dostoevosky, D.H. Lawrence or the late James — the shaping principle is less a matter of intellectual logic than of poetic imagination expressing itself through symbols and sustained metaphors.[36]

Evidently the Impressionists belong to the second category of novelists and their sole concern remains the analysis of individual feeling and emotions rather than panormic portraiture or prophetic prodigality. This tendency in novel writing has led to the development of what has been called the "Dramatic Novel".[37] In this kind of novel the hiatus between the characters and the plot disappears. The characters are not part of the machinery of the plot; nor is the plot merely a rough framework round the characters. On the contrary, both are inseparably knit together. This is why James in his essay, "Art of Fiction" rejects the earlier classification of novels

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36. Novelists on the Novel, pp. 165-166
37. The Structure of the Novel, (London, 1963 Imp.), pp. 40 ff.

and asks "What is character but the determination of incident ? What is incident but the illustration of character"? He asserts "A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is *something* of each of the other parts."[38]

It is the identity with itself of the dramatic conception that gives the plot of the impressionistic novel such organic and overpowering significance. Nothing in the plot is left out, or assumed. It may contain anti-thesis, but no mere contradictions. It will be logical in so far as the characters have something unchangeable in them which determines their responses to one another and to the situation. It will have a progression which is at once spontaneous and logical in as much as the characters will change and the change will create new possibilities. Ford Madox Ford amply brings out this aspect of the dramatic novel while discussing progression d'effet in the works of Impressionist novelists. This spontaneous and progressive logic is the real distinguishing feature of the plot of the dramatic novel. Everything does derive from factors stated and unalterable in the beginning but at the same

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38. The House of Fiction, ed. Leon Edel (1957), p. 34

time the terms of the problem will alter, bringing about unforeseen results.

The novelists' natural independence and flexibility, his sense that is his own personal vision which gives shape and meaning to his art, conflict with authoritarian efforts to tether him to 'rules'. But the new awareness and keen sensibility of the modern novelists result in their seeking the discipline of scrupulous aesthetic principles. A sign of this tendency is the novelist's increasing interest in matters of method and presentation. The effects of this interest are seen at their best in the finished art of 'pure' novelists like Henry James, Flaubert and Turgenev, whose art obeys instinctive and compulsive rhythms, of feeling alien to a rational art like Jane Austen's. But they seek to control these rhythms by various devices, all of which increase aesthetic distance. The desire to be just by imposing this kind of aesthetic order on recalcitrant material is, according to Dr. Miriam Allott, the most important single development in the evolution of the novel. The appearance of this new scrupulosity signalizes modes of feeling and thought altogether foreign to those which brought the novel into being.[39]

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39. Novelists on the Novel, p. 172

The new approach lies behind James's plea to bring the art of novel writing nearer the painter's, Conrad's exhortation in the Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus to make the novel something of a composite art, and Virginia Woolf's combination of impressionism and poetic metaphor. All this smacks of the urge to revolutionize the craft of novel so as to cater to the intellectual fastidiousness of twentieth-century reading public.

ii) Point of view :

In modern fiction criticism "Point of view" refers specifically to narrative technique — an ideal refinement in craftsmanship. It is one pattern of arrangement and denotes a system of presentation. If the intention is successfully realised, that in itself is an artistic merit like accurate drawing or observance of the laws of perspective. It is common knowledge that the story which the author tells is at one remove from what we call reality and gives us a different sort of pleasure from that which we derive from the direct observation of life. But if the author so arranges his story that it shall be told entirely from the point of view of one of his characters, he has made an extention of the principle involved in all artistic process. The special consciousness of the character

constitutes an added principle of selection, of composition, and interpretation.

The adoption of "point of view" and its advocacy by modern novelists like James, Conrad and Ford Madox Ford in their critical writings should not mean that the Victorians were blissfully ignorant of it or that they had no control over their material. It only shows that some of the modern novelists are more self-conscious than their predecessors and they write with a view to present their special kind of reality which they view from a specialized angle. Flaubert, for instance, did not present French bourgeoise society in Madame Bovary as an omniscient writer. Nor did he attempt to render his vision of life through the prevalent narrative methods like the "epic technique" or the "epistolary technique". Instead he revealed to us his vision of life through the consciousness of his heroine and the "point of view" of other characters. This, in other words, was an attempt to dramatise the situation in the novel which in its turn demanded that novels should be written like dramas. To achieve this goal the author should be first of all eliminated from the scene. In the works of earlier novelists , the author is everywhere present in person to see that we are properly informed on all the circumstances of the

action, to explain the characters to us and insure our forming the right opinion of them. But in the new method adopted by Flaubert the author is seen behind the characters as God behind his creations. The novelist does not apologize for his characters; he does not give an account of them. Above all, he has his characters tell us what they think, what they feel, what impressions beat in on their minds from the situations in which they find themselves. Judged from this standard, Flaubert's Madame Bovary is regarded as a novel of novels.

"Point of view" in modern fiction also implies certain restrictive principles. The exponents of the well-made novel attempt to equate their works with Greek drama which has a unity of design and an obvious unity of impression. Although Henry James as the chief exponent of the theory has not explained this in so many words, it is possible that his ideal of "dramatization" was more Greek (via French) in manner than English. Perhaps, his awareness of the pure art of Racine and Corneille in French drama and his association with Flaubert heightened his sense of objective reality as presented through the consciousness and the "point of view" of central and subsidiary characters. After Percy Lubbock's The craft of Fiction we can hardly afford to ignore the "point of view"

aspect of the novelist's technique. "The whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction", he says, "I take to be governed by the question of the point of view — the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story.[40] In the earlier development of the novel, the choice according to theory and practice alike, lay between "the narrative" or epic manner, which was derived from Cervantes and popularised by Le Sage in France and Fielding in England. The "personal memoir" used by Marivaux and Smollett, and "epistolary correspondence" which, combining features of the two other methods, was widely followed in France and in England. But the modern novelists — the Impressionists in particular — who plead for holding the prism upto nature recommend an indirect and oblique view of narration. This view is a method of story-telling which tries to retain the vividness and immediacy, the "warmth" of self-revelation while insisting on a vigilant editorship to control its "terrible fluidity". It aims at concentration, subtlety, economy and intensity.[41]

Henry James learnt the method of single "point of view" from such writers as Poe and Stevenson and afterwards developed this technique to multiple point of view in his later novels.

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40. The Craft of Fiction, sec. XVIII

41. See Novelists on the Novel, p. 191

Being terribly aware of the artistic shortcomings of the Victorian and the Russian novelists, he pleaded for better control of the material by the writer. Tolstoy's works appeared to him as "loose and large baggy monsters". His ideal of the "point of view" was to trim the novel of its cumbersomeness and confusing directions. Life, according to him is all "confusion" and Art is all "selection and discrimination". It is not through the epic and panoramic rendering of situations but through their dramatic and scenic presentation, that order could be restored in life. In James's shorter works, the observer whose "point of view" helps the dramatisation of situation, is quite simply 'the impersonal author's mouth-piece'. In The Americans, The spoils of Poynton, What Maisie Knew and even in The Ambassadors a single point of view is maintained virtually without interruption from beginning to end. Later the observer becomes some other "entangled, embarrassed agent", like the Prince or Merton Densher in The Golden Bowl and The Wings of the Dove.

Conrad also shows awareness of the "point of view", if not in theory, at least abundantly so in practice. He regards "oblique vision" as the sine qua non for catching the elusive impressions of life. He attempts to resolve his artistic difficulties by creating a permanently involved spectator,

Marlow. As in the case of James, so in Conrad's earlier works, the single point of view is followed. But as his art matured, he also adopted a multiple point of view. The narrators in Lord Jim, Nostromo, Under Western Eyes and Chance have unique perception and ability to grasp situations from the novelists' point of view.

Ford Madox Ford exploited this special technique in The Good Soldier and the Tietjens Saga. In his critical writings there is ample evidence of his preoccupation with the point of view and its allied techniques in rendering situations. He recommended the use of indirect method to give focus to the story. Supporting Conrad's use of Marlow's consciousness as a narrative focus, he maintained that "it is in that way that life really presents itself to us". Thus, according to Ford, "Form" is achieved less by the demands of the "Affair" a novel recounts than by the mode of the consciousness viewing it. The aim is psychological verisimilitude, that is, the rightness with which events are represented according to the workings of the narrative intelligence.

iii) Characterisation :

The importance of character in a novel is axiomatic. In

fiction criticism, too, the discussion about narrative technique is incomplete without a critical appraisal of the novelist's art of characterization. The role of character has undoubtedly changed with the evolution of the novel from the 'inclusive' to the 'exclusive' novel, but the characters show only such traits as are relevant to the author's pattern. The character acts as a vehicle for the expression of the author's personal vision of life.

It is almost certainly their impatience with the ordinary reader's failure to understand the nature of 'Homo fictus' which makes novelists react with such violence to the suggestion that their characters are portraits from life. Ford Madox Ford once wrote :

> I may make the note that I never in my life, as far as I can remember, used a character from actual life for the purposes of fiction — or never without concealing their attributes very carefully. This is not so much because I wish to avoid hurting people's feelings as because it is, artistically, a very dangerous practice. It is even fatal. 42

Obviously the novelist takes his impression about his characters through his contact with actual people. But in the process of creation he so transmutes them that they are hardly recognizable from the original. The confusion about 'portraits'

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42. F.M. Ford, It was the Nightingale (1934) (part II,ch.ii)

in fiction can come about, of course, through the novelist's own failure to adjust his original experience of a man or woman to its new imaginative context in a work of art. Henry James in his famous Preface to The Portrait of a Lady (1881) recounts this process in an illuminating manner :

> I have always fondly remembered a remark that I heard fall years ago from the lips of Ivan Turgenieff in regard to his own experience of the usual origin of the fictive picture. It began for him almost always with the vision of some person or persons, who hovered before him, soliciting him, as the active or passive figure, interesting him and appealing to him just as they were and by what they were. He saw them, in that fashion, as disponibles, subject to the chances, the complications of existence, and saw them vividly, but then had to find for them the right relations, those that would most bring them out; to imagine, to invent and select and piece together the situations most useful and favourable to the sense of the creatures themselves, the complications they would be likely to produce and feel.
>
> ... I drew from his reference to the intensity of suggestion that may reside in the stray figure the unattached character, the image en disponibilite[43]

In the final impression left by a novel the part played by the novelist's technique of character-creation is certainly very important. His views on the methods which serve him best are of a piece with a kind of response which his work usually creates; so we find that the man with a lively talent for

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43. Preface to The Portrait of a Lady, pp. 42-43

recreating the surface-textures of life recommends an approach very different from any of those preferred by the analyst of thought and feeling. The difference makes itself felt at the outset of the novel's history. "Words and actions" are "the only ways by which we come to any knowledge of what passes in the minds of others", writes Henry Fielding [44] but his sister Sarah, an admirer of Richardson maintained that "the motives to actions, and the inward turn of the mind" are "more necessary to be known than the actions themselves".[45] Novelists who belong to the tradition inaugurated by Richardson and culminating in Henry James and Joseph Conrad show that to explore beneath the surface appearance of things is to draw near to the central areas of tragic experience. It is obvious that both methods provide amply for the expression of personal idiosyncrasy. On balance, however, the 'dialplate' novelist seems to run fewer risks of disequilibrium and monotony. But in fact it is the 'inner workings' novelist who is the more interested in what makes character. His real concern is with what we call personality. Sometimes he does make use of certain 'dialplate' figures who provide the necessary ficelles for his narrative or suggest a kind of choric commentary on the action.

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44. Henry Fielding, The Champion (11 Dec., 1739)
45. Sarah Fielding, Preface to The Cry (1754)

Hardy's rustics and Conrad's natives in the Malayan tales play important roles in the novels of their creators.

In the end we recognize the true novelist by his strength with which his realisation of the actual world and of human individuality triumphs over his abstract speculations, his oddities and opinions, his puritan concern with the utile. Conrad, in one of his letters to Edward Noble, wrote :

> My dear Noble, do not throw yourself away in fables ... You have much imagination. Well, that imagination should be used to create human souls, to disclose human hearts ... and not to create events that are properly speaking accidents only. 46

Conrad was well aware of the fact that the story or the events by themselves do not have any significance unless they enable the novelist to "create human souls" and to probe their inner machinery.

iv) Style :

A novel is not only the best expression of the artist's personal vision, it also shows his command of the language and his mastery over the range and flexibility of style. This

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46. Life and Letters I, ed. G. Jean Aubry, pp. 182-83

ensures the reader's interest in the novel and helps him comprehend the true nature of the novelist's art. We should not, however, conclude that in order to be a novelist it is necessary to be a perfect stylist. There have been writers of fiction without Stevenson's 'elegant and pregnant texture' and yet they have established themselves as masters in the history of novel. Conversely, there have been novelists who have too much of style but little of life in their works. But, generally speaking, every novelist should be able to harmonise his thought and content with appropriate style and manner.

The new awareness about the efficacy of style and its vital link with the pattern of the novel led the Impressionist novelists to French fastidiousness in matters of beauty, of cadence, rhythm and precision. A feeling of responsibility for truth in handling words characterizes almost every pronouncement on style made by French novelists. "I know of only one rule" says Stendhal, "a style cannot be too clear, too simple".[47] But the French novelist who influenced the English Impressionists most was Gustave Flaubert. Flaubert's meticulous concern for style is revealed in some of his letters to Louis Colet. In one of his letters he wrote :

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47. Stendhal, Letter to Balzac (30 October, 1840)
Selected Letters, Tr. Norman Cameron (1952)

> ... I've imagined a style for myself — a beautiful style that some one will write some day, in ten years time may be, or in ten centuries. It will be as rhythmical as verse and as precise as science, with the booming rise and fall of a cello and plumes of fire; it will be a style which penetrates the idea for you like a dagger-thrust and from which at last thought is sent sailing over smooth surfaces as a boat glides rapidly before a good wind ... 48

Flaubert's pronouncements are invariably reflected in most of Conrad's critical writings on style. In him one finds as much concern for truth as for rhythm and cadence. In one of his letters to Sir Hugh Clifford, he wrote :

> The things 'as they are' exist in words; therefore words should be handled with care lest the picture, the image of truth abiding in facts should become distorted and blurred. 49

In his A Personal Record Conrad speaks about "style" :

> And in this matter of life and art it is not the Why that matters so much to our happiness as the How. As the Frenchman said, 'Il y a toujours la maniere'. Very true. Yes. There is the manner. The manner in laughter, in tears, in irony, in indignations and enthusiasms, in judgements and even in love. 50

Conrad, like Flaubert, considered style to be "Life" and

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48. Letter to Louis Colet (24 April, 1852), Correspondence (1900)
49. Letter to Hugh Clifford (9 Oct., 1899). Life & Letters I, ed. G. Jean-Aubry.
50. A Personal Record, "A Familiar Preface"

supported the view that style is "the life-blood of thought". Conrad's acute sense of style led him to a kind of exuberance in the early phase of his literary career but later he learnt to discipline his craft and achieved in his major novels a style that is characteristically his own.

Regarding the efficacy and felicity of style in fiction, Hardy suggests that it is better not to have "too much style" :

> ... The whole secret of a living style and the difference between it and a dead style, lies in not having too much of style —— being in fact a little careless, or rather seeming to be, here and there. 51

But this ease and freshness needs endless patience to achieve. Conrad writes of the art which conceals art!

> ... it is only through an unremitting, never-discouraged care for the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to colour, and that magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace surface of words ...
>
> My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make your feel —— it is, before all, to make you see. 52

Conrad's preoccupation with the stylistic aspects of his art

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51. Thomas Hardy, Note book entry (March 1875) The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (1840-1891), pp. 138

52. Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus, pp. 51-52

shows his concern with "truth" as well as the magic power that moves the reader. In the course of his collaboration with Ford Madox Ford, he displayed the same insight and care for his novels. Both Maupassant and Flaubert were their model. Ford in his Joseph Conrad, A Personal Remembrance wrote with characteristic ebullience :

> A style interests when it carries the reader along: it is then a good style. A style ceases to interest when by reason of disjointed sentences, over-used words, monotonous or jog-trot cadences, it fatigues reader's mind. Too great displays of cleverness are apt in the long run to be as fatiguing as the most over-used words or the most jog-trot cadences ... A succession of impressions of vagueness and length render a book in the end unbearable.

In the same passage he speaks about his collaboration with Conrad and the views they held about style :

> We used to say that a passage of good style began with fresh usual words to the end: there was nothing more to it. 53

In Henry James, of course, the whole quality, 'the magic suggestiveness', of his later works derives to a great extent from the use of extended metaphor. As with 'scene', 'picture' and such other elements in his art, they have their place in a

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53. F.M. Ford, Joseph Conrad, A Personal Remembrance (1924) Part III, Ch. II

quoted in Novelists on the Novel, pp. 321-22

closely worked design.

The use of image and metaphor á la James is perhaps no longer popular with contemporary writers of English and American fiction. But the contribution made by the Impressionists in English fiction is still cherished by many novelists in order to heighten the effect of their style and thereby charm the reader with 'magic suggestiveness'. James's disciplined use of image and metaphor, the written effects of Conrad's style and Ford's experiments paved the way for the rhythmic movements of Virginia Woolf's lyrical prose and opened new vistas in the style of fiction for successive generations of writers.

THOMAS HARDY

I) Let me repeat that a novel is an impression, not an argument.

(Preface to Tess of the D'Urbervilles, 1892)

II) Like former productions of this pen, Jude the Obscure is simply an endeavour to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings, or personal impressions.

(Preface to Jude the Obscure, 1895)

Chapter Two

THOMAS HARDY

Hardy's placement in English literary history is unique. He may legitimately be called the first of the moderns and the last of the Victorians. His writings show us the traditional, conscientious, thoughtful, characteristic late Victorian poet and novelist. As such his critical equipment is well worth observing before we engage the masters of the English theory of fiction.

Critics of Hardy, although acknowledging his greatness both as a poet and as a novelist, seem to be divided on the comparative merit of his achievements in either forms of literary expression. There is a school of thought which bisects Hardy as an artist, suggesting that he must be either a novelist or a poet. F.R. Leavis, as George Wing points out, is at the poetic pole in this matter;[1] H.C. Duffin in his Thomas Hardy (1916) stands on the other side. The better course for our understanding of Hardy would, no doubt, be to look at his works as a whole and to recognize in them the latent inter-relationship. To some extent Hardy himself is responsible for this division of opinion among his critics. In his journals and letters he indefatigably suggests his devotion to poetry and implies that his novels were just the product of 'necessity', mere 'serial-stuff' indulged in

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1. G. Wing, Thomas Hardy (1963), p. 100

for earning a living. He further emphasizes that the best of his philosophy and weltanschaung is to be found in his poems and the dramatic epic The Dynasts rather than in his novels.[2]

Hardy's casual attitude towards his novels has led critics like David Cecil to suggest that the novels are just 'a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' and that they lack the discipline characteristic of the works of masters like Flaubert or Henry James :

> Indeed, it is the inevitable defect of a spontaneous genius like Hardy's that it is impervious to education. No amount of painstaking study got him within sight of achieving that intuitive good taste, that instinctive grasp of the laws of literature, which is the native heritage of one bred from childhood in the atmosphere of a high culture. 3

This opinion may largely be attributed to the critic's failure to grasp the basic tenets of Hardy's art. F.R. Leavis was quick to perceive it. In her review of "Hardy and criticism" in the Scrutiny, she asserted :

> Hardy, we may justly reply, had a good Victorian education, was further equipped in the special arts and crafts of music and architecture, was generally well-read, as his note books show, had a remarkably accurate grasp of literary theory and a most intelligent response to its practice. 4

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2. The Later Life of Hardy, ed. F.E.Hardy (London, 1930),p.65 and 196.
   Herein after cited as LH II
   See also M.D. Zabel, Craft and Character, p. 79
3. Lord David Cecil, Hardy the novelist (1943)
4. Scrutiny (Reprint), Vol. XI, 1942-43
   F.R. Leavis: "Hardy and criticism", p. 232

That Hardy was a self-conscious artist and had a definite theory of the art of novel-writing is borne out not only by his cogitations throughout his journals and letters but also in his essays on contemporary novels and his attitude to some of the greatest masters in the craft of fiction. The Prefaces to the Collected Edition of his novels and poems further supplement our view of Hardy's seriousness as a novelist. His critical powers were invariably perceived by his reviewers and keen students of his novels. As early as 1916, H.C. Duffin had remarked in his prefatory note to the First edition of his study of Hardy :

> But, in fact, Mr. Hardy is conspicuous, even among writers of his rank, for complexity of critical appeal —for the wealth of original perception, of challenging thought, of strange and elusive beauty that lurks under the familiar, almost homely semblance of his art. 5

Arthur, MC Dowall in his study Thomas Hardy (1931) acknowledged Hardy's critical acumen :

> ... he was much more conscious as an artist than he was generally supposed to be ... 6

About a decade later, Edmund Blunden in Thomas Hardy (1942) remarked about Hardy's critical faculties :

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5. H.C. Duffin, Thomas Hardy (Prefatory Note, p.V)

6. A. MC Dowall, Thomas Hardy, p. 67

> In this "Candour in English Fiction" and other papers of Hardy, such wealth of original comment appears that a wish springs up aside from their actual occasion .... Those he has left us, few as they are, emerge from the mass of literary causerie in his age as specimens of powerful yet unforced grappling with the important and profound factors in the imaginative illustration of life. 7

True, Hardy was not a professional critic or a theorist like Walter Pater or Henry James. But he understood and assimilated the principles of the art of novel-writing and, to a considerable extent, succeeded in applying them to his novels in all conscience. He was not systematic in his pronouncements and he had little opportunity of codifying his theories on the art of fiction. But this should not lead us to underestimate his position as an intelligent critic of his craft and as a self-conscious artist.

Hardy's own scepticism about critical theory has led many a critic astray. Florence Hardy in the Preface to The life of Thomas Hardy warns us :

> The opinions quoted from these pocket-books and fugitive papers are often to be understood as his passing thoughts only, temporarily jotted there for consideration, and not as permanent conclusion —— a fact of which we are reminded by his frequent remarks on the tentative character of his theories. 8

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7. Edmund Blunden, Thomas Hardy, p. 83
8. Early Life of Thomas Hardy, ed. F.E. Hardy (London, 1928); Preface, pp. VII-VIII
   Hereinafter cited as LH I

Mrs. Hardy failed to remember that Hardy had made a rigorous selection of the wealth of material at his disposal before finalising his Notebooks. As such, it is no longer proper to treat his statements as just 'passing thoughts'. Hardy retained what he found relevant and valuable and ignored what he thought to be out-dated or tentative. Perhaps she was deceived by some of Hardy's casual and rather cynical remarks about 'theory'. As for example, Hardy said in 1882: "Since I discovered that I was living in a world where nothing bears out in practice what it promises incipiently, I have troubled very little about theories ... Where development according to perfect reason is limited to the narrow region of mathematics, I am content with tentativeness from day to day".[9] Obviously, Hardy was not denying the critical faculty, he was only suggesting the futility of rigid theory. No one knew better than him that critical vision is as vital for a creative artist as, say, pure inspiration. What he was emphasizing was that no amount of 'theorization' can make one a really great artist. His views on authors fed on 'theory and bred on 'correct education' is very revealing:

> The literary productions of men of rigidly good family and correct education, mostly treat social conventions and contrivances — the artificial forms of living — as if they were cardinal facts of life. 10

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9. LN I, p. 201

10. Ibid., p. 279

As far as Hardy was concerned, he could write to good purpose when he followed his own aesthetics. His modest aim when he embarked upon novels seemed to commit himself to write like other people. He was emulating Thackeray and Charles Kingsley in his first novel The Poor Man and the Lady and was imitating Wilkie Collins and perhaps Trollope in Desperate Remedies. It was a time when modes of writing were constantly changing. The first creative wave of the Victorian novel, the period of the Brontes and Thackeray and the liveliest strength of Dickens had ended in the fifties. The next decade had less spontaneous force, the first of Meredith and George Eliot and the mid-flow of Trollope and Wilkie Collins. The sixties were the turning point of old and new. But Hardy seems to have contributed little in his earlier phase. He showed small interest in the modern man's sceptical consciousness. He saw the growth of sophistication and critical intellection in art as evils at its root. His scruples as a workman and his methodical seriousness as a student, even his systematic ambition for literary fame, seem to have been outbalanced by his sense of being an outsider to art's higher mysteries. He was a contemporary, in other words, of Baudelaire, Flaubert and Tungenev, of James, Moore, Yeats, Proust, Pound, Valery and Eliot, but a colleague of none of them.[11] This sense

11. This point is beautifully suggested by M.D. Zabel in Craft & Character, pp. 73-77

of isolation from the main stream of writers and the uniqueness of his own perception, perhaps, led him to shape his personal aesthetics, which, despite its occasional arbitrariness, demands attention from anyone concerned with the artistic progress of the modern novel and with the inter-relation of modern fiction and poetry.

Literary Heritage :

As I have maintained earlier, Hardy was no adept at formal critical or aesthetic reasoning. He felt a life-long suspicion of its practitioners and his literary notes invariably suggest an element of impatience towards them. Yet his methodical habit of mind exercised itself over many years in notations on structure, form, style and aesthetic ideas, and in a continuous effort to generalize these into working principle. It is interesting to note that his first critical remark is about Thackeray and his appreciation of the novelist's realistic presentation of life.[12] The craft of fiction had not come to him easily. He was nibbling at poetry as an apprentice in architecture, but while leading a "triple existence",[13] he was also unconsciously preparing himself as a novelist. He had his hesitations and doubts. The groping awkwardness he showed

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12. LH I, p. 46

13. Ibid., pp. 41-42

in mastering the technique of fiction-writing is equalled by the step-by-step pains he took to come into some kind of conscious knowledge of his aesthetic purpose. He felt the pull of older tradition of romance and a brotherhood with masters of Victorian fiction, especially Scott, Thackeray, George Eliot, Trollope and Wilkie Collins. The dramatic and sensationalistic novelists of the sixties provided him with the skill of the trade . In drama, Hardy was a devoted student of Aeschylus and Sophocles and invariably showed his interest in Shakespeare's tragedies for the "plot" and the "tragic vision". His poetic loyalties rooted in the romanticism of Keats, Shelley and Tennyson, spent their last enthusiasm on Browning and Swinburne.

Apart from this literary heritage, Hardy was also influenced by his study of the theories and practice in music, architecture and painting. The influence of painting was, perhaps, the most vital. The full extent of Hardy's saturation in European art has never been fully recognized,[14] but it is an essential key to the proper understanding of Hardy as a writer and craftsman. The number of his references to art, in his journals and in his novels, is quite unusually large, and

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14. A study by A.Smart in The Review of English Studies (Aug. 1961), under the title "Pictorial Imagery in the Novels of Thomas Hardy" (pp. 262-280) is a successful attempt to trace the influence of visual arts on Hardy's theory and practice in fiction.

reflects a long and profound study which was most intense in his early days in London, when he made frequent visit to the South Kensington Museum and the National Gallery. It is doubtful whether any other English novelist with the possible exception of George Moore, possessed so intimate a knowledge of the visual arts; certainly no other writer of fiction (barring Henry James) has ever used such knowledge with equal skill or imagination. Hardy saw a closer correspondence between his own art as a novelist and the art of painting. This was suggested at the outset of his career by his choice of "A Rural Painting of the Dutch School" as the sub-title of Under the Greenwood Tree. It is not, therefore, surprising to find him in his journal comparing his own work with that of the painters whom he particularly admired. Thus he wrote in 1886 :

> My art is to intensify the expression of things, as is done by Crevilli, Bellini, etc. so that the heart and inner meaning is made vividly visible. 15

Turner, Correggio, Ruisdael and the French Impressionists, particularly, Manet and Courbet, seem to be his special favourites. As he reflected upon the visual arts, Hardy discovered in them unexpected resources which excited his imagination and stimulated his descriptive powers.

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15. LH I, pp. 231-32

Part of Hardy's literary theory is suggested only by implication or by his practice as a novelist. That the literary and artistic influences were in a way responsible for Hardy's aesthetics, his "subject matter" also demanded a set of theories or principles different from those of his contemporaries. Hardy was no 'historian of fine consciences'. He was as much concerned with 'life' as with 'living'. Hence the need to formulate not the Jamesian "poetics" but a kind of personal aesthetics. True, as a novice in the field he did grope for a method but when he came to himself and recognized his powers, he was convinced that the chronicler of Wessex life should strike a balance between the techniques of Victorian masters and that of the emerging school of highly self-conscious novelists — Flaubert, Proust and Henry James.

Attitude to Art :

A consideration of Hardy's theory of art may be valuable in the assessment of his theory of fiction and his own practice as a novelist. As early as 1877, we find him preoccupied with his search for a 'method'. His cogitations on the working of the artist's mind are, thus, very revealing. He wrote in his journal of June 1877 :

> There is enough poetry in what is left (in life), after all the false romance has been abstracted, to make a sweet pattern : e.g. the poem by H.Coleridge :
> 'She is not fair to outward view'.
> So, then, if Nature's defects must be looked in the face and transcribed, whence arises the art in poetry and novel-writing? which must certainly show art, or it becomes merely mechanical reporting. I think the art lies in making these defects the basis of a hitherto unperceived beauty, by irradiating them with 'the light that never was' on their surface, but is seen to be latent in them by the spiritual eye. 16

This passage clearly defines Hardy's literary attitude and this romantic view of nature remained with him throughout his career as a poet and as a novelist. He will no longer paint Nature in her benign moods. Rather, he will find 'beauty in ugliness' by showing the mysteries of Nature. Not only this, he will also emulate the romantic poets by following a pattern that suits his 'idiosyncrasy':

> As in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another; so in life the seer should watch that pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone. This is, quite accurately, a going to Nature; yet the result is no more photograph, but purely the product of the writer's own mind. 17

This emphasis on selection of the 'uncommon' and perception of

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16. LH I, p. 151
Cf."To find beauty in ugliness is the province of the poet" (Ibid, p.279)
Also "... I feel that Nature is played out as a Beauty, but not as a Mystery ... I want to see the deeper reality underlying the scenic, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings. (Ibid, p. 242)

17. LH I, p. 198 (Italics mine)

the unseen and unheard beauties of Nature is a re-echoing of the romantic theory of art. Hardy knew it from his own practice and also from a study of the art of contemporary French Impressionists that what is abiding in art is not social or public truth but individual truth — truth perceived by the artist's individual vision.

Referring to his experience in the British Academy of Arts, Hardy wrote in his journal of 1886 :

> At the society of the British Artists there is good technique in abundance; but ideas for subjects are lacking. The Impressionist school is strong. It is even more suggestive in the direction of literature than in that of art. As usual it is pushed to absurdity by some. But their principle is, as I understand it, that what you carry away with you from a scene is the true feature to grasp; or in other words, what appeals to your individual eye and heart in particular amid much that does not so appeal, and which you therefore omit to record. 18

This predominantly romantic attitude to life and art partly explains Hardy's aversion to 'realism'. True, he had announced earlier that the greatness of a novelist (like Thackeray) lay in a "perfect and truthful representation of actual life",[19] but Hardy's definition of "realism" is different from those of Zola, Wells and Dreiser. Perhaps few novelists are more careful than

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18. LH I, p. 241 (Italics mine)
19. Ibid. p. 46 (Letter to Mary Hardy, dated 19th. December, 1863)

Hardy in the meticulous details of his stories and in the delineation of the background against which his dramas are staged. The Prefaces to the novels more than prove Hardy's concern for realism or vraisemblance, as he calls it. His Wessex with its Green hill, Little Hintock and the Egdon are perfect representations but we also know that in order to heighten their impression he throws a glamour of romance over them. So that his Wessex, as he points out in the Preface to Far From the Madding Crowd, becomes "a dreamland" for the reader.

In his critical writings, Hardy repeatedly stresses the impossibility of recording "the whole truth".[20] The "truth" that the artist extracts from a scene turns out to be only the truth of the impression that the scene makes on him. As the artist works upon his impressions of reality, shaping them into some tangible piece of art, he must ever fall short of reproducing them as they originally existed in his perceptions. In one of his illuminating passages in "The Profitable Reading of Fiction" Hardy defines his attitude towards "imaginative truth" and "realistic truth":

> To distinguish truths which are temporary from truths which are eternal, the accidental from the essential, accuracies as to the perennial procedure of humanity, is of vital importance in our attempts to read for something more than amusement. There are

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20. See William J. Hyde: "Hardy's view of realism" in Victorian Studies (Sept. 1958)

> certain novels, both among the works of the living and the works of deceased writers, which give convincing proof of much exceptional fidelity, and yet they do not rank as great productions; for what they are faithful in is life garniture and not life. 21

Three years later, in his contribution to The New Review, Hardy emphatically condemned 'realism' and tried to uphold the imaginative theory of art. "The Science of Fiction",[22] thus, sums up Hardy's view on realism more systematically than any of his casual remarks. Admitting the desirability of "truth", Hardy argues that it is not in the reproduction of experience with "infinite and atomic truth" but in "the illusion of truth" that the greatness of art lies. The realists in their enthusiasm for embracing the whole of life seldom produce anything more than "life garniture". Hence his fulmination on "realism" and its apostles :

> Realism is an unfortunate, an ambiguous word, which has been taken up by literary sects like a view-halloo, and has been assumed in some places to mean copyism, and in others pruriency, and has led to two classes of delineators being included in one condemnation. 23

Hardy is no less prejudiced against photographic realism than Turgenev and Flaubert or James and Conrad. They all, in the

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21. Life and Art ed. Earnest Brennecke Jr. (New York, 1925), p.66 Herein after cited as LA.
22. Ibid., pp. 85-90
23. Ibid., pp. 87

final analysis, emphasize the validity of the truth of impression in works of art.

During the 'nineties, Hardy seems to have been reflecting more profoundly on the problems of art. For, apart from his famous essays that appeared between 1888 and 1891 in contemporary journals, we have the specific note in the diary, dated August 5, 1890 :

> Art is a changing of the actual proportions and order of things, so as to bring out more forcibly than might otherwise be done that feature in them which appeals most strongly to the idiosyncrasy of the artist. The changing or distortion, may be of two kinds :
> (1) The kind which increases the sense of vraisemblance:
> (2) That which diminishes it.
> (1) is high art: (2) is low art.
> High art may choose to depict evil as well as good, without losing its quality. Its choice of evil, however, must be limited by the sense of worthiness.[24]

This passage also, like other quotations, brings out some basic points of Hardy's theory: the choice of one sort of 'colour' or 'feature' in experience; the obedience to one's own 'idiosyncrasy' and to the effect of 'that alone' which heightens the impression. Hardy's comment, for all its reference to things in general, underlines a personal and subjective art. What the vision finds may be magnified, as his was, by that extremely concentrating lens.

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24. LH I, p. 299

In Hardy's art, an emotional penetration was the essential and his remarks, while they turn on reality, emphasize imagination as the discoverer. They belong to the period of the novels and it is from the novels that one remembers those moods of place and time he truly saw "into the heart of natural things" The same power works also in invention, with less difference perhaps, than Hardy supposed. If his invention was one of the clearest traits in his capacity, the happiest finds of it are surely those where it was most poetic. We know the aesthetic pleasure of such moments in the novels when the atmosphere and the tenor of the story are so imaged that brings a person, a place and time together with an arresting vividness. Hardy's sense of reality, thus, transcends that of social propagandists. Since he did not present an atomistic photograph of life, his portraits of the countryside do not possess the documentary interest of those of Jefferies (The Toilers of the Field), Kingsley (Yeast) and Zola (La Terre) Based as they are on the integrity of his individual power of selection, they appear to go much deeper, revealing character, as painting does, by the stressing of individual details. His representation or reproduction is invariably achieved by "the imaginative reason".

Hardy's theory of art, thus, corresponds closely to the

romantic theory which emphasizes "the imagination" and "the personal traits" (call it 'idiosyncrasy' or 'temperament' or whatever you like) in a work of art. Seeing "beauty in ugliness", showing "the sorriness underlying the grandest things and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things" and recording "impressions, not convictions", is Hardy's ideal of a poet's and a novelist's vocation. And I feel, in essence, this remained Hardy's guiding principle throughout his literary career.

It was Hardy's emphasis on "the romantic vision" and "the personal aspects" of art that led T.S. Eliot to single him out as the last of decadents for an exposition of his theory. In the final chapter of <u>After Strange Gods</u> he maintains that Hardy had written for the sake of "self-expression" and his works show "the intrusion of the diabolic into moral literature".[25] But as Mr J.I.M. Stewart argues in his essay "The Integrity of Hardy", the charges have been made more on "moral" grounds than "aesthetic".[26] It was to be expected, for Hardy with his moral candour in <u>Tess</u> and <u>Jude</u>, more than shocked the Eliots of his age. Eliot's attack, in essence, was against the romantic theory of art which Hardy so seductively represented in his creative writings.

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25. T.S. Eliot, <u>After Strange Gods</u> (1934), p. 54

26. <u>English Studies</u> (1948) (J.I.M. Stewart: "The Integrity of Hardy"), pp. 1-27

However, in fairness to Eliot's critical remarks, one may admit that Hardy is a powerfully emotional writer and his works do reflect a direct transcription from experience. One may even go to the extent of making a case, like Mr Steuart, for the novels "representing some interior drama of Hardy's soul, with Wessex as merely a staging". But all this does not necessarily prove Hardy's "morbidity". For neither in his diary nor in his letters or Prefaces he is ever seen parading his "self". He is, on the other hand, represented as a shy person, avoiding company. Even in his novels he is no more guilty of self-expression" than, say, Tolstoy or Flaubert or Conrad. Hardy distils and controls his material though the method is not that of Eliot. He believed that the prime task of the artist consisted in rendering his own emotional apprehension of experience but he also stood for the universalization of such experiences, which he could never have achieved by insulating his sensibility. To a humanist of Hardy's calibre who craves for the "still, sad music of humanity" in his art, and who reflects on the fundamentals of life — "We are such stuff/ As dreams are made of", the charge of 'morbidity' and 'self-absorption' can hardly hold good.[27] Hardy's so-called morbidity was not uncontrolled or disintegrative. His critical vision invariably curbs his spontaneity and rescues him from

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27. LA, pp. 89-90 ("The science of Fiction")

lapsing into Baudelairean 'morbidity'. In Hardy the novelist we find a notable effort for some synthesis between the freely outpouring spirit of the time and the stabilizing force of a strong historical sense. Almost his last statement on the poet's task (and here there seems no dichotomy between a poet and a novelist) is recorded in his journal of May 8, 1918 :

> My opinion is that a poet should express the emotion of all the ages and the thought of his own. 28

Art of the Novel :

The foregoing discussion on Hardy's attitude to art amply clarifies the novelist's views on the art of fiction. We may probe further in order to present Hardy's theory of novel in a better light. Fortunately for us, he has himself given a suggestive definition of the novel :

> Good fiction may be defined here as that kind of imaginative writing which lies nearest to the epic, dramatic, or narrative masterpieces of the past .... The higher passion must even rank above the inferior —— intellectual tendencies above animal, and moral above intellectual —— whatever the treatment, realistic or ideal. Any system of inversion which should attach more importance to the delineation of man's appetite than to the delineation of his aspirations, affections or humours, would condemn the old masters of imaginative creation from Aeschylus to Shakespeare. Whether we hold the arts which depict mankind to be, in the words of Mr Matthew

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28. LH II, p. 188

> Arnold, a criticism of life, or, in those of Mr Addington Symonds, a revelation of life, the material remains the same, with its sublimities, its beauties, its uglinesses, as the case may be. 29

This passage may be taken to represent the quintessence of Hardy's theory of fiction. He is fully conscious of the fact that the novel as a "form" is nearest to the "imaginative writings" of the past and in "scope" shares some of the characteristics of the epic, dramatic and narrative poetry. He also emphasizes the fact that in order to heighten the impression of things observed, the novelist has to be selective in his treatment. Again, without bothering about the jargons of professional critics, he attributes to the art of fiction "the sublimities, the beauties and the uglinesses", as they come into the observer's ken.

That Hardy also attached great importance to the "form" of the novel should not be lost sight of because of his casual remarks about the superiority of "poetry". In the final analysis, imaginative writing, whether prose or verse, becomes poetry for Hardy. In his essay "The science of Fiction", he recognizes the scope of the novel :

> Since Art is science with an addition, since some science underlies all Art, there is seemingly no

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29. LA ("The Profitable Reading of Fiction"), p. 61

> paradox in the use of such a phrase as "the science of fiction...
>
> The particulars of this science are the generals of almost all others. The materials of fiction being human nature and circumstances, the science thereof may be dignified by calling it the codified law of things as they really are .... The Science of Fiction is contained in that large work, the cyclopaedia of life. 30

Hardy's view of the comprehensiveness of novel as a literary form and his own preference for it is further illustrated by his reply to The Pall Mall Gazette (1892). William Archer, writing in the Fortnightly Review, had urged the desirability of a reunion between literature and the drama, had suggested that living novelists were to blame for the divorce, and that they owed it to themselves to make some attempt in dramatic form. Whereupon The Gazette invited the leading novelists to answer questions regarding the desirability of unifying the two forms and the reasons for the comparative merit of the novel or the drama. Hardy's preference revealingly goes to the novel :

> Because, in general, the novel affords scope for getting nearer to the heart and meaning of things than does the play. 31

Recognising the wider scope of the novel, Hardy did not rule out the variety of treatment of life by writers of diverse temperament and 'idiosyncrasy'. By 1888 he had passed over his

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30. LA, p. 85 (Italics mine)

31. Ibid., ("Why I Don't write Plays), p. 116

phase of early straggling for method. Much as he had to suffer for his dabblings in sensation-stuff (following Meredith literally for his remarks on Desperate Remedies), Hardy still thought that sensationalistic novel should not be condemned wholesale. There was still a case for its justification. He wrote in his journal of January 14, 1888 :

> A sensation novel is possible in which the sensationalism is not casualty, but evolution; not physical but psychical .... The difference between the latter kind of novel and the novel of physical sensationalism — i.e. personal adventure, etc. — is this : that whereas in the physical the adventure itself is the subject of interest, the psychical results being passed over as commonplace, in the psychical the casualty or adventure is held to be of no intrinsic interest, but the effect upon the faculties is the important matter to be depicted. 32

This passage partly explains Hardy's use of the marvellous and the supernatural in his novels. Hardy always finds a justification for these elements provided their effect on the faculties is psychological and not just physical. Their purpose should not be to pile horror upon horror in the manner of the "Terror Novels" of Mrs Radcliffe but to play upon the emotions of the readers.

Apart from the sensationalistic novel, Hardy also takes into account the social novel, the exotic novel, the didactic

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32. LH I, p. 268

novel and the novel of adventure. He finds justification for such genres so long as they are imaginative transcripts of life. But at the same time he reacts against the social novel becoming "a photographic transcription of life"; the exotic novel delighting in mere "far-off things" and the didactic novel presenting a treatise on moral and religious problems. Hardy does not deal explicitly with all these forms of contemporary novel but his attitude is well defined. For example, discussing 'the didactic' and the imaginative or artistic novel in "The Profitable Reading of Fiction," he says :

> ... the didactic novel is so generally devoid of vraisemblance as to teach nothing but the impossibility of tampering with natural truth to advance dogmatic opinion. Those, on the other hand, which impress the reader with the inevitableness of character and environment in working out destiny, whether that destiny be just or unjust, enviable or cruel, must have a sound effect, if not what is called a good effect, upon a healthy mind.
> ... A novel which does moral injury to a dozen imbeciles, and has bracing results upon a thousand intellects of normal vigour, can justify its existence. 33

This brings us to the problem of morality in the novel. Hardy, it may be conceded, believed in the ethical values of art but he had his own ways of presenting them. Lionel Johnson remarked that Hardy used, in the English way, powers with many likenesses

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33. LA, p. 66

to the French genius of his time. If that remark will apply, it applies best to a kind of logic of candour in him, a disillusioned and pungent use of reason that ignores the conciliatory philosophies of the Victorians. It was he as much as any one who during the nineties declared the necessity of exploring in daylight the relationships and the complications which make up the history of men and women. He offered a prologue to his own full declaration, through the novel, on the subject when in the New Review for January 1890, he published his opinions on "Candour in English Fiction".

Hardy, as Edmund Blunden points out, was at the time weary of the long years he had spent in a literary compromise.[34] He had toiled long enough in the factory of household reading, supplied in monthly or weekly rations by the magazines and in other forms by the circulating libraries, and now he would have a day off to release his natural indignation. As early as 1874 when he was serializing Far From the Madding Crowd, Hardy had realized the crippling effect of a domestic magazine on his art, In his letter to Mr. Stephen he wrote :

> The truth is that I am willing, and indeed anxious, to give up any points which may be desirable in a story when read as a whole, for the sake of others

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34. Edmund Blunden, Thomas Hardy (1941), pp. 64-66

> which shall please those who read it in numbers. Perhaps I may have higher aims some day, and be a great stickler for the proper artistic balance of the complete work, but for the present, circumstances lead me to wish merely to be considered a good hand at a serial. 35

Even in the early phase of his career Hardy knew that no proper "artistic balance" was possible in a family magazine and that one has always to make compromises if one has to live by his pen. Sixteen years of grim experience with the puritans of the age as 'patrons' only served to confirm Hardy's views as to the bondage imposed upon imaginative writing by the magazines. In his essay "Candour in English Fiction",[36] he ruthlessly condemned the magazine both on moral and aesthetic grounds. He asserted that "the object of the magazine and circulating library is not upward advance but lateral advance".[37] Hence, the magazine in particular and the circulating library in general "do not foster the growth of the novel which reflects and reveals life". Hardy knew it to his own cost how his own imaginative works were mutilated to satisfy the prudery of the Victorian parents :

> It is in the self-consciousness engendered by interference with spontaneity, and in aims at a compromise to square with circumstances, that the real secret lies of the charlatanry pervading so much of English fiction. 38

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35. LH I, p. 131
36. LA, pp. 75-84
37. Ibid., p. 78
38. Ibid., p. 80

That Hardy had his own moral scruples about art is amply borne out by his letters, notes and prefaces. But his frankness in dealing with "explosive material" brought an avalanche of criticism from the press and the pulpit alike.

Such was Hardy's loathing of Victorian prudery that he refused to oblige his readers by mutilating his art. He was no more willing to compromise with the charlatanry of his age. In his Preface to Tess of the D'urbervilla he declared :

> ——Though the novel was intended to be neither didactive nor aggressive but in the scenic parts to be representative simply, and in the contemplative to be oftener charged with impressions than with convictions, there have been objectors both to the matter and to the rendering.
>
> Let me repeat that a novel is an impression, not an argument .... As soon as I observe that any one, when judging of poetical representations, considers anything more important than the inner Necessity and Truth, I have done with him. 39

Again, he wrote about Jude the Obscure :

> Like former productions of this pen, Jude the Obscure is simply an endeavour to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings, or personal impressions, the question of their consistency or their discordance, of their permanence or their transitoriness, being regarded as not of the first moment. 40

By way of counter-attack to the compaign of vilification

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39. Preface to Tess of the D'Urbervilla (1892); Italics mine.
40. Preface to Jude the Obscure (August, 1895).

launched by his critics, Hardy added the Postscript to his Preface in 1912 :

> Artistic effort always pays heavily for finding its tragedies in the forced adaptation of human instincts to rusty and irksome moulds that do not fit them. To do Bludyer and the conflagaratory bishop justice, what they meant seems to have been only this : 'We Britons hate ideas, and we are going to live up to that privilege of our native country. Your picture may not show the untrue or the uncommon, or even be contrary to the canons of art; but it is not the view of life that we who thrive on conventions can permit to be painted.

Hardy was, in a way, in line with the writers like Shelley and Swinburne. His moral candour, though appreciated by the genial critics, also brought such statements as : "Swinburne planteth, Hardy watereth and Satan gives the increase."[41] This persistent hostility of the critics and the public forced him to take the drastic step of giving up fiction for good. The choice of poetry as his future form of expression was not just a matter of convenience. Hardy knew that if he expressed himself in verse, he would be spared of a good deal of vituperative criticism. In this connection his note of Oct. 17, 1896 is significant :

> Perhaps I can express more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystallized opinion — hard as rock —which the

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41. LH I, p. 111

> vast body of men have vested interests in supporting. To cry out in a passionate poem that (for instance) the supreme Mover or Movers, the Prime Force or Forces must be either limited in power, unknowing or cruel—which is obvious enough, and has been for centuries—will cause them merely a shake of the head; but to put it in argumentative prose will make them sneer, or foam, and set all the literary contortionists jumping upon me, a harmless agnostic, as if I were a clamorous atheist, which in their crass illiteracy, they seem to think is the same thing .... If Galileo had said in verse that the world moved, the Inquisition might have let him alone. 42

Thus the most original and imaginative English novelist of the last part of nineteenth century, after strenuous discussions, arrived at the decision of writing no more 'prose'. He was even glad that a decision had been forced upon him. Obviously having said all that he had to say, he wished to resume his earlier vocation of "poetry" which was to afford him not only mental relaxation but also a "strategic" victory over his critics.

Form of the Novel :

As for Hardy's formal aesthetics of the novel, it needs hardly be emphasized that his idea of "form", "structure" or the "point of view" is not modern. He did not bring about a change in the plot structure or the methods of presenting character. Hardy does new things with the novel, but he does not, like

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42. LH II, p. 56 (Italics mine)

George Eliot, Henry James or Joseph Conrad, invent something like a new shape for it. Hardy's conception of a 'well-rounded tale' is not different from the Victorian idea of a plot. In his article "The Profitable Reading of Fiction", he defined it as follows :

> Briefly, a story should be an organism. To use the words applied to the epic by Addison, whose artistic feeling in this kind was of the subtlest, 'nothing should go before, or follow after it, that is not related to it'. 43

Applying this standard, Hardy discusses in the same essay some of the most famous of English novels. Tom Jones, though great in character-drawing, feeling and philosophy is "not superior in artistic form over some other novels of lower reputation". The Bride of Lammermoor is an "almost perfect specimen of form, which is the more remarkable in that Scott, as a rule, depends more upon episode, dialogue, and description, for exciting interest, than upon the well-knit interdependence of parts". And the first thirty chapters of Vanity Fair "may be instanced as well-nigh complete in artistic presentation, along with their other magnificient qualities". Lastly, he discusses Clarissa Harlowe: "No person who has a due perception of the constructive art shown in Greek tragic drama can be blind to the constructive art of

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43. LA, p. 69

Richardson".

Hardy's study of classical Greek drama and his apprenticeship as an architect had obviously great influence on his sense of 'form'. He advocated unity of design and singleness of theme in a really perfect work of art. Although in practice he could apply these theories together with the famous unities of Time and Place only in a few (e.g. The Return of the Native) of his novels, yet he always aspired to achieve classical perfection of form. Hence his adherence to Addison, the neo-classicist. This also shows his sceptical reaction against the Elizabethans. Hardy admired and assimilated Shakespeare but he could hardly approve of the Elizabethan "mingling of the tragic and the comic" or the heresy of 'plot' and 'under-plot' which less gifted artists were bound to make a sorry mess of. This conviction of Hardy is borne out by one of his remarks in his journal, dated Sept. 6, 1896 :

> Finished reading King Lear. The grand scale of the tragedy, scenically, strikes one, and also the large scheme of the plot. The play rises after the beginning of the third act, and Lear's dignity with it. Shakespeare did not quite reach his intention in the King's character, and the splitting of the tragic interest between him and Gloucester, does not to my mind, enhance its intensity, although commentators assert that it does. 44

No wonder critics of Hardy, more often than not, correlated his

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44. LH II, p. 54

art to that of the Greek masters who followed rigorously the classical design and the laws of Nature and Necessity.

Hardy's definition of "tragedy" also conforms to the classical patterns of dramatic literature :

> The best tragedy — highest tragedy in short —is that of the Worthy encompassed by the Inevitable. The tragedies of immoral and worthless people are not of the best. 45

Obviously, Hardy is considering "tragedy" along Aristotlean lines. His own heroes and heroines are human beings with exceptional qualities but they are also plagued by a "tragic flaw". This is responsible for enmeshing them in a series of unavoidable circumstances which lead them to final catastrophe. One has only to look at the long list of Hardy's heroes — Michael Henchard, Clym Yeobright, Giles Winterborne , Angel Clare and Jude Fawley —and notice in them the elements of nobility, fine feelings, greatness of soul and yet each with his own "tragic flaw". The gallery of his heroines — Tess, Sue, Eustacia, Elizabeth-Jane, Grace and Marty, also confirms our view of Hardy's imitation of classical Greek models. They are also gifted with nobility of soul and mind but they too have their shares of hamartia, and are flawed gems all. Hardy

45.L.H. II, p. 14

exhibits the swirl and surge of their souls under the stress of circumstances and the problems of existence. They are eventually beaten but they fight bravely. Their fall inspires love and sympathy in us rather than 'morbidity'. We experience a terrible sense of waste in these modern dramas of human struggle against inexorable forces. Hardy called Tess a "Pure woman" just to signify that she was really pure in 'spirit' though not in 'body' and that she deserved our sympathy for her sufferings.

D.H. Lawrence, in his famous "Study of Thomas Hardy", acknowledges Hardy's greatness as a tragic poet but finds his characters more pathetic than tragic and their stature far more smaller than that of classical tragic heroes. Contrasting Hardy with classical masters, he says :

> The difference is that whereas in Shakespeare or Sophocles the greater, uncomprehended morality, or fate, is actively transgressed and gives active punishment, in Hardy and Tolstoy the lesser, human morality, the mechanical system is actively transgressed, and holds, and punishes the protagonist, whilst the greater morality is only passively, transgressed, it is represented merely as being present in background, in scenery, not taking any active part, having no direct connection with the protagonist. 46

But this argument does not necessarily go against Hardy's classical sense of tragedy and its application in modern

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46. D.H. Lawrence, Phoenix (Revised Edition 1961) "Study of Thomas Hardy", pp. 419-20

literature. If we remember one of Hardy's remarks about "poets", the issue becomes quite clear : "My opinion is that a poet should express the emotion of all the ages and the thought of his own". An artist with such a historically conscious sensibility could not have just transcribed Greek and Elizabethan tragic heroes into Victorian doublets. It would have gone against the spirit of the time. Hardy was much too aware of the intellectual element in his readers to agree to a "willing suspension of disbelief" in Delphic oracles or deux et machina a la Sophocles or even Macbeth's witches. Equally pertinently Hardy realised that in the age of Darwin, Mill and Spencer, it would be foolish to talk of 'gods' coming in person to undo human aspirations. Though he makes references to 'gods' and 'The President of the Immortals', we know that Hardy's use of the machinery is more psychological than physical. Basically, it is society and its conventional code of morality that is more responsible for the misery and catastrophe of human beings than the curses and blasphemies of the powers above. This becomes very clear if we try to understand Tess and Jude in the light of Hardy's own development as a writer and thinker. His men and women are not merely 'pathetic' as Lawrence observed but also 'tragic'. They inspire as much 'pity' and 'fear' as any of the

classical tragic characters. But if they appear less violent in transgressing "the uncomprehended morality" and less blind to their limitations, it is because Hardy has humanised (or rather modernized) the entire concept of tragedy. Their worlds end not only with a "bang" but also with a "whimper". By this I do not mean that Hardy has quite "rationalised' tragedy. The symbolic use of the marvellous and the supernatural is a fruitful study of Hardy's craftsmanship. He builds up his atmosphere with ghostly and uncanny presences and adds to our sense of 'more things than are dreamt of in your philosophy'. Hardy, however, was not writing "dramas" in the classical sense. His representative novels, though based on Greek patterns of tragedy, are also good stories in the sense that drama can never be. And it is this fact that Hardy never fails to emphasize :

> The real, if unavowed, purpose of fiction is to give pleasure by gratifying the love of the uncommon in human experience, mental or corporeal.
>
> "This is done all more perfectly in proportions as the reader is deluded to believe the personages true and real like himself.
>
> "Solely to this latter end a work of fiction should be a precise transcript of ordinary life; but,
>
> "The uncommon would be absent and the interest lost. Hence,
>
> "The writers' problem is, how to strike the balance between the uncommon and the ordinary so as on the one hand to give interest, on the other to give reality.

> "In working out this problem, human nature must never be made abnormal, which is introducing incredibility. The uncommonness, must be in the events, not in the characters; and disguising its unlikelihood, if it be unlikely. 47

This concern with 'story element of his art is not only revealed in Hardy's reference to the Biblical narratives which, according to him, have the "spherical completeness of perfect art",[48] but also in a later entry in his diary :

> A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling. We tale-tellers are all Ancient-Mariners, and none of us warranted in stopping wedding Guests (in other words, the hurrying public) unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of every average man and woman.
>
> The whole secret of fiction and the drama — in the constructional part — lies in the adjustment of things external and universal. The writer who knows exactly how exceptional and how non- exceptional his events should be made, possesses the key to the art. 49

Hardy's argument, thus proceeds from the value of 'the exceptional' to the necessity of maintaining verisimilitude and consistency in his characters. Here he is not on different grounds than those trodden by Horace Walpole, Walter Scott and Hawthorne.[50] Hardy's problem, on the one hand, is to satisfy

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47. LH I, p. 194
48. Ibid., p. 222
49. LH.II, pp. 15-16
50. For a detailed account of "The Novel and the Marvellous" see Mirriam Allott, Novelists on the Novel, pp. 3-20

the curiosity of the reader and on the other, to keep his material well under control lest it becomes just "fantasy". Hardy's handling of his tales is acknowledged even by such critics as T.S. Eliot who feels that Hardy seductively lures his readers. What is lost sight of is that Hardy, apart from the "tonic value" of the novel, also emphasizes its intellectual, moral and aesthetic value. Admitting that "side-interests" and "digressions" cannot be ruled out from a lengthy tale, he suggests:

> Our true object is a lesson in life, mental enlargement from elements essential to the narratives themselves and from the reflections they engender. 51

Again :

> Closely connected with the humanizing education found in fictitious narrative which reaches to the level of an illuminant of life, is the aesthetic training insensibly given by familiarity with story which, presenting nothing exceptional in other respects, has the merit of being well and artistically constructed ... to a masterpiece in a story there appertains a beauty of shape, no less than to a masterpiece in pictorial or plastic art, capable of giving to the trained mind an equal pleasure. 52

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51. LA ("The Profitable Reading of Fiction"),p. 60

52. Ibid., p. 68

Requisites of Style :

No discussion on theory and craftsmanship in fiction is complete without a consideration of the problems of style. In the case of a really good writer style is the expression of himself. But it expresses him by being adequate to what he has to say and also subordinate to what he works in. The individuality of a style is seen through its content. That is true of imaginative prose as of other kinds and applies to the best writing in contemporary fiction, so far as the direction of this is to find the precise equivalents, in language, of the writer's perceptions and impressions.

Hardy considered style to be not an isolated ingredient of the novel but something organic. In his essay "The Profitable Reading of Fiction", he says :

> The indefinite word style may be made to express almost any characteristic of story-telling other than subject and plot, and it is too commonly viewed as being some independent, extraneous virtue or varnish with which the substance of a narrative is artificially overlaid. Style, as far as the word is meant to express something more than literary finish, can only be treatment, and treatment depends upon the mental attitude of the novelist; thus entering into the very substance of a narrative, as into that of any other kind of literature. A writer who is not a mere imitator looks upon the world with his personal eyes, and in his peculiar moods; thence grows up his style, in the full sense of the term. 53

53. LA, p. 71 (Italics mine)

Hardy, obviously, is emphasising the personal bias or the individual trait in the style of a writer. Given his temperament, he would never subscribe to the neo-classical doctrine of methodizing nature in the image of past masters, nor would he ever submit to T.S. Eliot's 'de-personalization' theory in style. In the same essay he suggests the readers to study the 'interior' rather than the 'surface' if they want to profit by the study of style. They should "formulate an opinion of what it consists in by the aid of their own educated understanding, their perception of natural fitness, true and high feeling, sincerity, unhampered by considerations of nice collocation and balance of sentences, still less by conventionally accepted examples".

That Hardy detested "nice collocation" and "conventionally accepted examples" in style is obvious throughout his notes in his journals and also in his prefaces. As early as January, 1881, he defined his creed :

> Style — consider the Wordsworthian dictum (the more perfectly the natural object is reproduced, the more truly poetic the picture) This reproduction is achieved by seeing into the heart of a thing (as rain, wind, for instance), and is realism, infact, though through being pursued by means of the imagination it is confounded with invention, which is pursued by the same means. It is, in short, reached by what M. Arnold calls, 'the imaginative reason'. 54

54. LH I, p. 190

But, though Hardy agreed with Arnold in the use of 'imaginative reason' he did not approve of his plea for standardization of style (for example, the French 'preciseness') :

> Arnold is wrong about provincialism, if he means anything more than a provincialism of style and manner in exposition. A certain provincialism of feeling is invaluable. It is of the essence of individuality, and is largely made up of that crude enthusiasm without which no great thoughts are thought, no great deeds done. 55

It is this romantic attitude towards 'spontaneity' in style that has brought forth the criticism of more sophisticated writers and critics like T.S. Eliot and Henry James. In spite of a conventional "form" in which he works, Hardy's style remains distinguished with a personal touch. His prose makes no disguise and seems to register not merely his strength or defect, but all the fluctuations that may appear in a long piece of writing.

From our study of Hardy's criticism we conclude that he accepts a 'personal' formula for style but he never sets down to work out its details. One thing, however, is clear. Hardy would never stand by the exponents of "too much style". As early as March 1875 he had expressed his views on style in a valuable document. The occasion was a letter from Conventry

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55. LH I, p. 189

Patmore expressing the view that A Pair of Blue Eyes was in its nature not a conception for prose, and that he "regretted at almost every page that such unequalled beauty and power should not have assured themselves the immortality which would have been impressed upon them by the form of verse". Hardy was much struck by this opinion from Patmore. However, finding himself committed to prose, he renewed his consideration of prose style :

> Read again Addison, Macaulay, Newman, Sterne, Lamb, Gibbon, Burke, Times leaders etc., in a study of style. Am more and more confirmed in an idea I have long held, as a matter of common sense, long before I thought of any old aphorism bearing on the subject "Ars est celare artem". The whole secret of a living style and the difference between it and a dead style, lies in not having too much style — being in fact a little careless, or rather seeming to be, here and there. It brings wonderful life into the writing :
>
> A sweet disorder in the dress...
> A careless shoe-string, in whose tie
> I see a wild civility,
> Do more bewitch me than when art
> Is too precise in every part.
>
> Otherwise your style is like worn half-pence — all the fresh images rounded off by rubbing, and no crispness at all.
>
> It is, of course, simply a carrying into prose the knowledge I have acquired in poetry — that inexact rhymes and rhythms now and then are far more pleasing than correct ones. 56

Hardy, it should be admitted, preaches no 'lawlessness' in

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56. LH I, p. 138

matters of style or treatment. He never for a moment forgets the propriety of style within limits. What he detests is too much of correctness and preciseness in presentation of life. Here he is with Conrad who despite his reverence for Henry James, maintained that James's preoccupation with style and his constant endeavour for "too much perfection of method" was solely responsible for his unpopularity.[57]

Hardy was much too unsophisticated to be influenced by the theory of "well-made novel" or the nuances of style à la James. All that he remembered or cared to remember was the personal note in his writings. Even in the use of language he finds himself at home only when he is following his own instincts. He can be successful with the dialogue of rustics but as soon as he tries to imitate urban conversation, he flounders. But even in the use of the 'dialect' he avoids 'precise accents' and makes use of the language of the rustics 'creatively' because his "aim is to depict the men and their natures rather than their dialect forms".[58] His defence in his letter to the Editor of the Spectator (Oct. 15, 1881) is based on the same theory :

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57. See Conrad's letter to Galsworthy, dated Feb. 11, 1899. Life and Letters I (ed. G. Jean-Aubry), pp. 270-71

58. LA "Dialect in Novels", p. 115

> I have been reproved for too freely translating dialect English into readable English, by those of your contemporaries who attach more importance to the publication of local niceties of speech than I do. The rule of scrupulously preserving the local idiom, together with the words which have no synonym among those in general use, while pointing in the ordinary way most of the local expressions which are but a modified articulation of words in use elsewhere, is the rule I usually follow; and it is, I believe, generally recognised as the best, where every such rule must of necessity be a compromise, more or less unsatisfactory to lovers of form. 59

Once again, in matters of style, Hardy was being self-conscious in using the language 'creatively' rather than 'precisely'. And hence his distinction over writers like Jefferies.

Towards Modernism :

Hardy's theory of fiction becomes all the more clear when we try to find a pattern in his remarks on certain novelists. It is a pity that he left no full-fledged essay on his contemporaries or predecessors to allow us any coherent study but whatever exists would give us a clue to his general attitudes. He had appreciated Thackeray at the early age of twenty-three while still an apprentice in London. To him Thackeray's greatness lay in his "perfect and truthful

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59. LA, "On the use of Dialect", p. 114

representation of life". He was sceptical of Scott's powers as a novelist but he read and enjoyed him with George Eliot and Wilkie Collins. Hardy, I may venture to suggest, carved a way between Thackeray and Scott whom he had studied and assimilated early in life. He applied Thackeray's 'realism' in his depiction of Wessex life and borrowed some of his ideas and images from the regional novels of Scott. Together with Thackery and George Eliot, Scott remained, perhaps, the greatest influence on Hardy. Not only their imaginative preoccupations seem to be identical but they also share a legend common to both. As Douglas Brown points out, it was a phase of history that concerned Scott's imagination and processes of change, resistance and absorption that moved through his anxieties into tragic fables.[60] He wanted to preserve what was passing away. Hardy's novels and his Notes and Prefaces (as external evidence) also suggest the same concern. But Hardy is a much more complex artist than Scott. In him we find many strains of diverse pattern which belie any attempt to work his imitation of Scott any further.

Hardy detested 'lack of sympathy' in creative artists. In his essay "The Science of Fiction" he had emphasised that all genuine writers should have "a power of observation

60. Douglas Brown, Thomas Hardy : The Mayor of Casterbridge, pp. 44-47

informed by a living heart". He refused to write an Introduction to Fielding's novels in 1898 because "his aristocratic, even feudal attitude towards the peasantry should be exhibited strongly..." [61] He could enjoy Meredith as belonging to "the succession of Congreve and the artificial comedians of the Restoration", but was disappointed to find him incapable of discovering "the tragedy that always underlines comedy". [62] He could even endure Henry James who had nothing but a "ponderously warm manner of saying nothing in infinite sentences" [63] than find Meredith interesting. In one of his remarks of March 4, 1915, he wrote : "Have been reading a review of Henry James. It is remarkable that a writer who has no grain of poetry, or humour, or spontaneity in his productions, can yet be a good novelist. Meredith has some poetry and yet I can read James when I cannot look at Meredith". [64]

These remarks show not only Hardy's likes and dislikes but they also suggest implicitly his own views about the art of the novel. He liked Anatole France as a writer "who is faithful to the principles that make for permanence, who never forgets the value of organic form and symmetry" [65] but seems to have no patience with his late contemporaries who violate all

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61. LH II, p. 74
62. LH II, p. 257
63. LH I , p. 257
64. LH II, p. 169
65. LA, p. 121

principles of good fiction that he cherished both in theory and in practice :

> Thought on the recent school of novel-writers. They forget in their insistence on life, and nothing but life, in a plain slice, that a story must be worth the telling, that a good deal of life is not worth any such thing, and that they must not occupy a reader's time with what he can get at first hand anywhere around him. 66

The attack is obviously on the Realistic school of novelists in England — Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells and John Galsworthy — who, in their enthusiasm for "reality", tended to forget or sacrifice the basic canons of art. Hardy as has been observed earlier, was not against "realism". It was photographic realism which he disapproved and instead upheld the use of "imaginative reason" for creative works.

Dr. M.C. Bradbook in her monograph on Conrad has suggested some salient features of Conrad's theory of fiction.[67]

Appearances	not Emotions
Perceptions	not Reflections
Dramatisation	not Discursiveness
Suggestion	not Statement
Implication	not Theory

I may submit the following as Hardy's theory of the novel :

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66. LH. II

67. M.C. Bradbrook, Joseph Conrad : Poland's English Genius, p.20

Impressions	not Convictions
Romanticism	not Naturalism
Imagination	not Formula
Selection	not Comprehensiveness
Candour	not Compromise

Let it be admitted, in all fairness to Hardy, that he was not a theorist of the stature of Flaubert, James or even Conrad. He never systematised his ideas into a coherent theory. But, in practice, his basic tenets remain his guiding thread throughout his career as a novelist. True, he went a long way from the earlier juvenalia to the creation of Tess and Jude but ever since he came to his own in Far From the Madding Crowd, he adhered to his principles fervently. He was so much convinced of the genuineness of his theories that he refused to benefit from the experiements of Flaubert, Zola and Henry James. He would not normally accept any theory from 'above'. We know the story of his experiement in The Return of the Native to write a novel with an 'Aeschylean intention and a Sophoclean unity and grandeur'.[68] He had even tried to preserve the unities of Time and Place by limiting the action to the narrow space of Egdon Heath and the time to a year and a day. Beyond this he also tried many expedients in speech, movement and atmosphere to make the novel something like a "Greek tragedy". But the direct, formal and structural correspondence seems to

68. Modern Fiction Studies (Autumn, 1960)
John Paterson: "The 'Poetics' of The Return of the Native" pp. 214-222

have become diffused in the process of creation. Consequently, the novel, more or less, falls in line with *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Woodlanders* than with Greek plays. Nobody has benefitted more than Hardy from the study of classical Greek drama but he succeeds only when he has assimilated the spirit of Greek art into his own. This evocation of the classical heroic atmosphere succeeds only in a personal frame of reference that gives dignity and meaning to his art. He follows his basic principles through *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the D'urbervilles* and also *Jude the Obscure*. The emphasis on social realities in the last novel seems to have betrayed critics like Arthur Mizner and Walter Allen to the extent that they feel Hardy's naturalistic technique sets it off from his earlier and more characteristic fiction. *Jude the Obscure* illustrates Hardy's view that a writer should be free to select his materials, to give shape and form to them, to explore their poetical and metaphysical implications and to declare his belief, however tentative or qualified, in values which he deems to have some "permanent validity in experience".

In view of our study of Hardy's theory of fiction and his own practice as a novelist, it is difficult to accept,

Zabel's theory of 'incongruity' and 'central discordance' in Hardy's aesthetics.[69] It goes to Hardy's credit that without being a follower of any of the contemporary schools of fiction, he stands distinguished among creative writers of his age. There seems no apparent schism between his artistic principles and achievement in creative fiction. He is not one of those "who abound in precept, apology and formula" but remains first and last an energetic practitioner of his craft. Nonetheless his theories do help us with a standard with which to measure his achievements. His conventionalism in fiction and its theories are enlightened by his vigorous mind and exuberant imagination to such an extent that we can regard him among the pioneers of modern English novel.

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69. M.D. Zabel, Craft and Character (New York, 1957) "Hardy's Defence of His Art: The Aesthetic of Incongruity", pp. 70-94

HENRY JAMES

I) A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life : that, to begin with constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression.

("The Art of Fiction", 1884)

II) Any point of view is interesting that is a direct impression of life.

("The Great Form" : A letter to the Deerfield Summer School, 1889)

Chapter Three

HENRY JAMES

Henry James is undoubtedly the most important figure among the pioneers of fiction criticism in English. Before he made his *debut* on the literary scene, it was difficult to find a coherent and systematic study of the art of novel in England or America. But in him we have an artist-critic of rare imaginative and intellectual powers whose "saturation" in the craft of fiction culminated in the vast bulk of critical studies covering almost all the major aspects of the novel. The interest that he evinced in the theory of fiction is revealed in one of his early observations in "The Art of Fiction" :

> Art lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt, upon the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints.... The successful application of any art is a delightful spectacle, but the theory too is interesting .... Discussion, suggestion, formulation, these things are fertilising when they are frank and sincere. [1]

Henry James was not a philosopher aesthetician. He never formulated a comprehensive or organic aesthetics like Aristotle. He could neither investigate nor appreciate the major bulk of French and English classical literature. In other words, he never arrived at a relation to the whole body of literature

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1. *The House of Fiction*, ed. Leon-Edel (Paper-back, London 1962) (Hereinafter cited as HF)

such as we find in Coleridge, Arnold and Eliot. Instead he worked empirically, pursuing consistently his personal interests in fiction, drama and the fine arts, especially painting. But within these limitations he showed an integrity of interest which is perhaps unparalleled in the history of modern literature. As an "artist-aesthetician", to use Mr. Collingwood's phrase, James produced the most coherent study of the novel and stands not only as a pioneer in the criticism of fiction but also as an exponent of the theory of impression in English novel.

Although Henry James's status as a literary critic has not been disputed by serious students of the novel, it is not difficult to come across critics who dismiss his critical writings as the intelligent and sophisticated views of a skilled artist and fail to regard them as the work of a perceptive critic. The best that F.W. Dupee, in his study of James can say of the novelist in his role of critic, is that "as an essayist, and especially on French subjects, he was touched by that academic humanism and ready-made classicism of the cultivated American who expects literature to be at all times in the full-dress of its courtly prime and cannot

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2. R.G. Collingwood, The Principles of Art (Oxford Paperback, 1963),p.3. The author distinguishes between two kinds of art critics— the artist-aesthetician and the philosopher - aesthetician.

forgive Flaubert for failing to be Racine". This seems to be a charming statement but it is difficult to reconcile Dupee's Racinian James with Henry James who championed Flaubert and Zola against a philistine and prurient Victorian world, praising them as artists even while condemning their 'ferocious pessimism'.

Dupee's sceptical reactions to James's criticism seems to have its roots in certain remarks by T.S. Eliot long ago. Eliot maintained that Henry James was "emphatically not a literary critic. His criticism of books and writers is feeble .... Henry was not a literary critic." Eliot recognised that James, in his novels, is a fine critic of persons but denied him access to ideas. In Eliot's paradoxical language, "he had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it."[3] Before Eliot, George Moore, entering a drawingroom one evening and hearing James's voice, murmured to himself (and reported his murmur to his readers) "an extraordinarily able critic ... a man too analytical for creation finds his job in criticism".[4] Percy Lubbock seems to be re-echoing Moore when in The Craft of Fiction he pronounces James as "the novelist who carried his

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3. "On Henry James"(1918) in The Question of Henry James, ed. F.W. Dupee, (London, 1947), pp. 123 ff.

4. HF, p. 10

research into the theory of the art further than any other — the only real scholar in the art".[5] Among later scholars, R.P. Blackmur in his Introduction to The Art of Fiction (1934) and Harold Mc Carthy in his Henry James: The Creative Process (1958) rate James high among literary critics. The apparent divergence in the opinions of some of the critics of Henry James's criticism is based on the controversy whether he is first and foremost an artist or a critic. But, perhaps, the bifurcation of creative and critical faculties in a writer like Henry James is uncalled for. James was a novelist and a creative writer and his criticism was always coloured by his creative intelligence. While reading other novelists he gained insight into himself as a novelist. Thus his constant emphasis on the importance for criticism of a writer's artistic intention is understandable. Leon Edel very rightly points out that as novelist-turned critic James was constantly asking himself, "What are they trying to do ?" and this was the surfacing of a buried question, "How shall I do it?"[6] James's approach to criticism was, in the nature of things, a large one: his criticism had in it the preoccupation of the artist and the reflection of the scholar.

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5. Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (London, 1921), pp. 186-87

6. Leon Edel : "The Literary Convictions of Henry James" Modern Fiction Studies, III (Spring, 1957), p.4

Henry James's, Notebooks, Prefaces and most importantly his essays and reviews offer us the vision of a theorist appraising the work of some of his compeers and defining his own general attitude to the art of fiction. Criticism, according to James, has a high utility, but this occurs only when it proceeds from 'the efficient combination of experience and perception'. Then the critic can be real 'helper of the artist, a torch-bearing outrider, the interpreter, the brother'. The requirements James enumerates would make of the critic a transcendental being indeed: his standards seem almost inhumanly high. The critic lends himself, steeps himself, tries to feel until he attains understanding so that he has perception at the pitch of passion and expression as embracing as the air. "Curiosity, patience, plasticity, an active mind, inflammability, sentience, restlessness, the capacity to react, reciprocate, penetrate". Criticism is the critic, just as art is the artist, and James reminds critics that it was "assuredly the artist who invented art and the critic who invented criticism, and not the other way round".[7]

The best kind of criticism, James held, derived from the liveliest experience. He deals with life at second-hand as well as at first. He deals with the experience of others

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7. HF ——Introduction, pp. 12-13

which he resolves into his own; he is concerned with the "uncompromising swarm of authors, the clamorous children of history". And what should emerge from his pen, finally is a portrait, "a text preserved by translation". In his Preface to What Maisie Knew, he further elucidated the point: "To criticise is to appreciate, to appropriate, to take intellectual possession, to establish in fine a relation with the criticised thing and make it one's own."[8]

Attitude to Art :

This theory of criticism, so tentative, so empirical, so conscious of all the difficulties of what James calls "the most postponed and complicated of the arts, the last qualified for and arrived at, the one requiring behind it most maturity, most power to understand and compare",[9] does not, however, do justice to James's practice. Actually James has an extraordinary grasp of the nature of art, its relations to reality and the other activities of man; he has very definite, though often implicit, requirements for successful art and he has the power to apply his standards to the authors he examines. His theoretical position seems clear-cut and coherent. He is neither a

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8. The Art of the Novel, ed. R.P. Blackmur (Paperback, London, 1962), p. 155 (Hereinafter cited as AN)

9. The American Essays, ed. Leon Edel (New York, 1956), p. 116 (Hereinafter cited as AE)

"realist", the label pinned on him in most histories of literature, nor a "formalist", a devotee of art for arts' sake, for which he is often dismissed.

James categorically disapproved of "art for art's sake" as he understood it: its creed seemed to him to exhibit "a most imperious disbelief in the illimitable alchemy of art"[10] to presume a false divorce of art from reality and morality. James, no doubt, admires Gautier and quotes the poem "L'art" as "a case of an aesthetic, an almost technical conviction, glowing with a kind of moral fervour",[11] but he dismisses the preface to Mlle de Maupin as ridiculous[12] and chides Gautier for the hardening of his moral feelings. As Gautier is a "master of a perfect style which has never reflected a spiritual spark",[13] so Baudelaire is merely another inordinate cultivator of the sense of the picturesque which he found even in darkness and dirt. Baudelaire offers a proof for "the crudity of sentiment of the advocates of 'art for art'".[14] The representatives of the aesthetic movement in England did not appeal to James either: he reviewed Swinburne's drama Chastelard[15] most unfavourably

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10. French Poets and Novelists, (London, 1878), p. 201 (Hereinafter cited as FPN)
11. Ibid., p. 38
12. Ibid., p. 35
13. Ibid.,pp. 55-56
14. Ibid., p. 64 (Hereinafter Cited as FPN)
15. Notes & Reviews (Cambridge, Mass, 1921), pp. 132-33 (Hereinafter cited as NR)

and severely trounced Essays and Studies as "simply dabbling in the relatively very shallow pool of the picturesque". Pater, so far as James read and understood him, appeared to him "curiously negative and faintly grey.... He is the mask without the face;[16] and Oscar Wilde "was never in the smallest of degree interesting" to him but had become so in the trial only because of "this hideous human history".[17] D'Annunzio finally gave an occasion for a summing up on the aesthetic movement : a spectacle "strange and finally wearisome," that of "beauty at any price," which James confirmed by the example of D'Annunzio.

The Pre-Raphaelite movement was also a case in point. William James wrote to Henry in 1883: "You ought to have seen the Rossetti exhibition, — the work of a boarding School girl, no colour, no drawing, no cleverness of any sort, nothing but feebleness incarnate, and a sort of refined intention of an extremely narrow sort, with no technical power to carry it out". Henry responded with hearty agreement, adding that it was one of the reasons why, if it was good to have one foot in England, it was better, or at least as good, to have the other out of it. Pre-Raphaelite painting was, for James an example of the results obtained when the artist lives off the artistic

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16. Selected Letters of Henry James, ed. Leon Edel (London, 1956), p. 178 (Hereinafter cited as SL)
17. Ibid., p. 179 (Hereinafter cited as SL)

products of others, without a consideration of the human conditions through which they were conceived, or without a sense of an affinity between such artistic products and the conditions of his own experience.[18]

The criticism of the aesthetic movement is directed at the moral obtuseness and its falsity to a full reality. But James cannot be described as a "realist" or a "moralist". Certainly there are many passages in James's writings which, in general, indicate approval of "realism" and profess his admiration for what are usually considered its masters: Balzac, Flaubert, Maupassant, Daudet, George Eliot and Turgenev. Over and above James repeats that "the only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life",[19] and that it has the "large, free character of an immense and exquisite correspondence with life".[20] James criticizes George Sand for lacking "exactitude — the method of truth"[21] and as early as 1864, recommends "the famous 'realistic' system for study" and advises the author of a picturesque novel, Miss Harriet Prescott, to "cultivate a delicate perception of the actual."[22] In his last survey (1914) he praises "the New

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18. Harold T.Mc Carthy, Henry James: The Creative Process, (London, 1958), p. 49

19. HF, p. 25

20. HF, p. 41

21. FPN, p. 184

22. HR, pp. 23-32

Novel" for "hugging the share of the real", its "appetite for a closer notation, a sharper specification of the signs of life". He constantly welcomes "exactness — truth of detail", "saturation", "specification" in Balzac and Flaubert. He admires Wells and Bennett for being each "immersed in his own body of reference", for "being saturated" which "is to be documented" for the "smell of packed actuality" emanating from their books".[23]

But this insistence on the reference of art to reality, and James's emphasis on 'solidity of specification' or 'saturation' should not mean that he is on the side of the Realists or the Naturalists. As a matter of fact he is as much against "exclusive aestheticism" as against exclusive "immersion" into realism. He does not consider art as a mirror or "an amorphous slice of life" as Zola would like him to have it. His path lies mid-way between the so-called Esthetes and the Naturalists. His attitude to art, to life and to literature clearly illustrates where he stood among the critics and the artists. Though Henry James called life "all inclusion and confusion" and art "all discrimination and selection" he did not mean that life and art were incompatible. On the contrary, the artist took what he found transitory and inchoate in actual

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23. Notes on Novelists with some other Notes (New York, 1916), pp. 320-324
(Hereinafter cited as NN)

life and transmuted it into the permanence of art. Or, to use James's own metaphor, life provided the yarns of varied colours from which evolved the figured carpets of the imagination.

In his Preface to The Ambassadors, James tried to define the scope of art: "Art deals with what we see, it must first contribute full handed that ingredient; it plucks its material, otherwise expressed, in the garden of life —which material elsewhere grown is stale and uneatable."[24] The subject of art was life, or more particularly someone's apprehension of the experience of it, and in striving truly to represent it, art removed the waste and muddlement in which it is lived and gave it a lucid, intelligible form. By insisting on intelligence and lucidity something like an ideal vision was secured; not an ideal in the air but an ideal in the informed imagination, an ideal, in fact, actually of life, limited only by the depth of the artist's sensibility of it. Thus art was the viable representation of moral value; in the degree that the report was intelligent and intense, the morals were sound.

The ultimate function of art in James's mind is certainly not that of a social mirror or propaganda. He deplores that prose fiction now (1914) "occupies itself as never

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24. AN, p. 312

before with the 'condition of the people', a fact quite irrelevant to the nature it has taken on, with the result that its nature amounts exactly to the complacent declaration of a common literary level".[25] But James is acutely aware of the social roots of art. "The flower of art blooms only when the soul is deep ... it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature".[26] This is the insistent theme of the book on Hawthorne, his having lived in a crude and simple society. "No state in the European sense of the word, and indeed barely a specific national name. No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, no manors."[27] The nostalgia for Europe with its snobbish overtones has its deeply felt seriousness : a concern for the isolation of the artist, particularly in the United States, and a fear of leveling, of the smoothing of edges, of the decay of character which James still finds in Balzac and Dickens but begins to miss in an egalitarian democracy. James can then go to extremes of illusionism and escapism. The function of the novel will be "to provide another world", an experience that, as effective as the dentist's ether, muffles the ache of the actual."[28] But art can hardly be only a pain-killer. James

25. NN, p. 316
26. Hawthorne (New York, 1956), p. 2
27. Ibid., p. 34
28. NN, p. 436

himself adds immediately : "What we get of course, in proportion as the picture lives, is simply another actual — the actual of other people", though he professes not to know why that should be a relief. Usually James understood that we return to reality fortified, that the artist, in allowing us "to live the life of others" not only extends our experience but gives us a view of the world and a knowledge of ourselves.

Synthesis, a total view of the world and of man, presupposes an inclusiveness of art, forbids a partial view of reality; implies an artist speaking as a whole man. This is where morality or conscience, comes into James's scheme and literary standards. Art must not be purely descriptive, mere local colour, a mere reproduction of the surface of the world. Gautier and Pierre Loti are great masters of the picturesque but they ignore the soul of man. But man, James demands, must not be represented partially, as a mere animal. He must appear as a total human being, moral and intellectual.

This almost transcendental view of art demands an equally high degree of sensibility and imagination in an artist. If an artist possessed keen sensibility and a discerning imagination, he must then accept as the province of his art what

his experience provided. This "experience" varies with the qualities of the creator's mind: " . . . the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. In proportion as that intelligence is fine will the novel, the picture, the statue partake of the substance of beauty and truth".[29] After about a quarter of a century when he had expressed these opinions, James elaborated this point in his Prefaces : "Tell me what the artist is and I will tell you of what he has been conscious".[30] Again, in the Preface to The Golden Bowl he symbolised the ideal artist as the poet par excellence".[31] Art, in other words, is 'poetry' in the widest sense of the term. As Stuart P. Sherman points out: "It is an escape from the undesigned into the designed, from chaos to order, from the undiscriminated into the finally assorted, from the languor of the irrelevant to the intensity of the pertinent".[32] This 'poetry' has its other aspects too — the relationship of art (or 'poetry') to society — which should not be lost sight of by any critic of Henry James.

Henry James described his writing of fiction as an "act of life" and this term suggests the important truth that the creative process is not only continuous with everyday experience

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29. HF, "The Art of Fiction" (1884), p. 44
30. AN, p. 46
31. AN, pp. 340-41
32. Stuart P. Sherman: "The Aesthetic Idealism of Henry James" in The Question of Henry James (London, 1947), p. 92

but is a particularly meaningful and deeply felt kind of experience, with roots that extend far out into society, both present and past. Art, he insisted, should multiply our relations with life, and he believed artists must draw their inspiration from their experience. Clearly, if art was to be vital, it had to respond to the forces that were actively shaping contemporary culture. Through his art he could clarify for others what was happening in the social order. Partly for this reason, James's creative writing promised to comment meaningfully on the social conditions of his day, such as the conflict between European and American standards, or the conflict arising within the individual consciousness as the result of shifting social ideas.

James's letters and other personal writings after the turn of the century disclose an increased concern on his part with the importance and potentiality of the individual human being. He vigorously opposed any static organization of theories about art as well as the pressures that sought to make taste and ideas in general conform to a norm. He wanted each individual to cultivate his own sense of things and to realise to the full his capacity for growth. There is a humanistic principle at the root of James's endeavour. The careful analysis

of experience he so urgently advised was intended to discover the worthwhile values operative in contemporary culture.

Although James had a strong desire to keep his personal life private, he provided the public with a more nearly complete record of the genesis and growth of his work than has any other novelist, and he supplemented this with many discussions of the art of the novel. He felt keenly an obligation to instruct both artists and the public in order that art might not only become better in itself, but thereby become a more effective instrument for social improvement. It is necessary to note, however, that James believed art served society best when the artist did the best work of which he was capable, and each artist had to determine that matter for himself. The last thing James had in mind was that society should determine what the artist should do.

The relationship between art and society, as James saw it in practice over a long span of years, was characterized more by antagonism than by any recognition of mutual need and responsibility. On its side, society chose to look to art for non-aesthetic functions — chiefly education and amusement — and even these were interpreted narrowly. The artist, by and large, held out as little to society. There was a retreat from common

shared experience to unrelated individual and subjective worlds. It was, as James believed, the era of the ivory-tower, of the "aristocratic and esoteric", and other withdrawls reflecting a lack of common purpose, of unifying beliefs and ideals. In the face of this separation, James ceaselessly waged a battle to restore the artist to his place as a responsible cultural leader while preserving, at the same time, the highest standards for art.

James recognized that there was considerable worth attached to the incidental contributions art could make to society. But its greatest value for society was that it could offer aesthetic experience of a kind more meaningful to the mind and spirit of man than all but a very few experiences encountered in the visual lifetime. While he deplored efforts to turn the novel into a vehicle for teaching, James pointed out that aesthetic experience could be more effective than any explicit teaching as an instrument for cultural improvement. Aesthetic experience, while directing no more imperatives to the reader, could reveal a possible ideal and make the public aware of what could be and hence critical of what is.

Fiction and other Literary Forms :

It is for the scope and opportunity provided by the

novel that James regards it to be the best and the most comprehensive of literary forms. In his essay "The Art of Fiction," he was emphatic about the novel being a sister art with painting, because both "attempt to represent life". The analogy between the art of the painter and that of novelist seemed complete to James's vision: "Their inspiration is the same, their process (allowing for the different quality of the vehicle), is the same, their success is the same."[33] He went on to assert the "sacred office" of the novel, admonishing Anthony Trollope for his want of discretion in calling it a mere "make-believe". He considered the art of the novel to have something in common with philosophy also: "It seems to me to give him (the novelist) a great character, the fact that he has at once so much in common with the philosopher and the painter; this double analogy is a magnificient heritage".[34] This is why James agreed heartily with Mr. Besant's view that fiction was "one of the fine arts, deserving in its turn of all the honours and emoluments that have hitherto been reserved for the successful progression of music, poetry, painting, architecture."[35] It was on the inspiration of Besant's essay that James wrote his famous article on "The Art of Fiction".

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33. HF, p. 25
34. Ibid., p. 26
35. Ibid., p. 26

James continued to regard the novel as the most potential literary medium throughout his literary career. Even his later essays on the Novel — "The Future of the Novel" (1899) and "The New Novel" (1914) confirm his convictions of the sacred office of the novelist. His attitude to different forms of literature further illustrates this point. James was never particularly interested in poetry; he seems to lack the descriptive vocabulary in speaking of Musset, Morris or Lowell. But he has his special genre theory for lyric poetry, a recognition of its peculiarly personal character. "The poet is most the poet when he is preponderantly lyrical, when he speaks, laughing or crying, most directly from his individual heart.... It is not the image of life that he thus expresses, so much as life itself, in its sources — so much as his own intimate, essential states and feelings."[36] Like Conrad, James did not have any real taste for poetry. But quite unlike his younger contemporary, he was full of superlatives for drama. In 1857 he considered the "dramatic form of all literary forms the very noblest" and indulged in an elaborate comparison between the drama and "a box of fixed dimensions and inelastic material, into which a mass of precious things are to be packed away". "To work successfully

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36. The Future of the Novel : Essays on the Art of Fiction, ed. Leon Edel (New York, 1956), p. 104
(Hereinafter cited as FN)

beneath a few grave rigid laws, is always a strongman's highest ideal of success."[37] James's admiration for drama is largely due to the demands for unity, economy and concentration made by the stage. As a matter of fact James wanted to bring into the novel 'God's plenty' but only in an ordered, discriminated way. It was this blind faith in the effectiveness of drama that he started his own unfortunate dramatic experiments. In a way it was not till his utter failure in drama that he realised that a play and a novel are eternally distinct forms and have their own laws. However, James did bring certain elements of drama both in the theoretic discussion of the novel and in his own practice, particularly in the last phase of his literary career. Matthiessen goes to the extent of saying that James was writing "poetic drama" in his novels of the "Major phase" and illustrates it from novels like The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl".[38]

Having considered James's attitude to art and literary forms in general we may profitably turn to his famous definition of the novel in "The Art of Fiction" :

> A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression.... The form, it seems to me, is to be appreciated after the fact: then the author's choice has been

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37. Views & Reviews, introduction by La Roy Phillips (Boston, 1908), pp. 181-82 (Hereinafter cited as VR)

38. F.O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (Galaxy Book, New York, 1963), pp. 73 ff.

> made, his standard has been indicated: then we can follow lines and directions and compare tones and resemblances. 39

Life, as James came to elucidate later, is all a jumble, a chaos, the sum-total of a multitude of impressions. It is given to the artist to give form and shape to this amorphous material. Thus both the "material" and the "form" are equally important from the artist's point of view. James's categorical statement makes it abundantly clear that at least in the early phase of his literary career he was not fanatically pursuing the cause of "form".

James considers a work of art to be the grand-total of the impressions of an artist. Every artist looks at life and has his distinct and individual impression. Thus life in its multiety and variety offers scope for all those endowed with keen sensibility and creative imagination. In his Preface to The Portrait of a Lady he very convincingly illustrates this point :

> The house of fiction has, in short, not one window, but a million — a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will

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39. HF, p. 29

> .... They are but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life. But they have this mark of their own that each of them stands a figur with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other. He and his neighbours are watching the same show, but one seeing more where the other sees less, one seeing black where the other sees white, one seeing big where the other sees small, one seeing coarse where the other sees fine....The spreading field, the human scene, is the "choice of the subject"; the pierced aperture, either broad or balconied of slit-like and low-browed, is the "literary form"; but they are singly or together, as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher — without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist. 40

Life, as James suggests, would appear different to different temperaments. It appears mystical, profound and painful to the romantics but it is benign, lustful and joyous to the optimists. It is ultimately the artist's "consciousness" which helps him hold the mirror upto nature in a distinct and individual way.

The Substance of Fiction :

It has been argued that the origin of art's substance is to be discovered in fragments of life itself and that art draws upon history and manners for flesh to clothe its spirit. But what is the precise connotation of 'substance'? Its full nature

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40. AN, p. 46

defies description, for it is infinite. Its manifestations within James's own work are as varied as the separate experiences which he depicted. For our present purpose, however, a general definition is possible. Art — and for James art was, of course, pre-eminently fiction — had for its substance the imaginative experience of a sensitive consciousness.

The definition rules out action for action's sake. It also rules out, for James, something not so elementary. His strictures on a number of his contemporaries illustrate what he deplored. Gautier, he remarked, "Cared for nothing and knew nothing in men and women but the epidermis" ("Theophile Gautier", 1873); the evil portrayed by Baudelaire began "outside and not inside" ("Charles Baudelaire", 1876). In the meantime he had lamented that Daudet, Maupassant and the Goncourts were too much concerned with the world of senses rather than "the deeper, strange, subtler inward life, the wonderful adventure of the soul" ("Pierre Loti", 1888). James realised his "substance of fiction" into what he called "the international theme". The complexity in James's attitude to the international theme exhibited a variety of tendencies, even inconstancy and inconsistency. It is not merely a spectacle of divergent national manners and attitudes played off against each other in

carefully selected areas, but a serious attempt to resolve these conflicts, to escape from the restrictive categories of the provincial, local and native, into a more spacious, human and comprehensive reality.

Inseparable from the substance of life is its moral element. We are to think of morality in James as part of one's concept of life as a creative adventure in a social world. But when we turn for concreteness, to James's evaluation of the substance of literature we must interpret his moral comments in the context, not only of the paragraphs in which they occur, but of the whole corpus of his fiction and of all that is known about his way of interpreting life. A good example of our need for caution is his complaint that Baudelaire "has, as a general thing not plucked the flowers — he has plucked the evil-smelling weeds" ("Charles Baudelaire", 1876). Certainly he was not by temperament inclined towards affinity with Baudelaire. What disturbed him, however, was no single passion or theme in Baudelaire's poem, but the lack of a strong unifying principle which would make the passions assume their places in a vast field of human experience of which they were only a part. Evil was, as James saw it, in the yielding to disintegrative forces,

whereas art should be on the side of discipline and order.[41]

Professor Rene Wellek in his study, "Henry James's Literary Theory and Criticism", points out that James always held two views he felt perfectly compatible : discontent with the timidity of the Anglo-Saxon conventions and embarrassment and even horror at the eroticism of the French novel.[42] It became particularly acute in the case of Maupassant, whom James calls "a lion in the path", as it seems to him "discouraging to find what low views are compatible with mastery" that one can be "at once so licentious and so impeccable".[43] Even the admired Balzac, we are told, "had no natural sense of morality, and this

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41. In his essay "The Art of Fiction" James had referred to the 'difficulties' involved in the discussion of the moral consciousness in a work of art. The social background and the tradition of different nations may demand different sets of morality in different countries. In the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady, James was on surer grounds :

> "There is, I think, no more nutritive or suggestive truth in this connection (the "immoral" subject and the moral) than that of the perfect dependence of the "moral" sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it. The question comes back, thus, obviously, to the kind and degree of the artist's prime sensibility, which is the soil out of which his subject springs. The quality and capacity of that soil, its ability to "grow" with due freshness and straightness any vision of life, represent, strongly or weakly, the projected morality". (AN, p. 45)

42. American Literature (Nov., 1958), pp. 306-307

43. Partial Portraits (London, 1919), p. 284, 287
(Hereinafter cited as PP)

we cannot help thinking as a serious fault in a novelist".[44] And Flaubert is elaborately criticized for the limit of his moral vision, culminating in the extravagant charge of "inexperience and indifference in regard to the phenomena of character and the higher kinds of sensibility."[45] In ever new variations James develops a contrast with the English and American novel and the Anglo-saxon character in which the French appear as master of craft and form, as painters of the surface of the world, of sensations and instincts and desires, of the relations between men and women, but as utterly deficient in depicting "the operation of character, the possibilities of conduct, the part played in the world by the idea."[46] The contrast between the English novel and the French is drawn so sharply that the English appear as the blundering, formless, prudish psychologists and moralists and the French as the shallow, immoral masters of the surface and the sensations. The implication of the contrast is obvious. James aims at righting the balance. He himself tries to create the psychological, moral novel which is also a work of art. The moral view, then, in James's sense (as he also suggested in the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady) required a full acceptance of the condition

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44. FPN, p. 89
45. Essays in London and Elsewhere (New York, 1893), p. 159 (Hereinafter cited as EL)
46. Ibid., p. 183

of life — sensual and psychological and the search for the greatest ordering of the vastest conceivable Universe.

The Transmutation of the Substance :

The transmutation of the substance into a work of art is the real execution of the 'creative' plan in James's theory of the novel. Long before an author has begun to think as a creative artist he has inevitably begun to discover relationships among a plethora of things as they have crowded upon his consciousness. But the mind of an artist is an unruly genie, refusing to confine itself to one thought or method at a time. It follows most irregularly the vigorous patterns which it shapes for its own discipline. Yet for the purposes of analysis one can differentiate the images, the preoccupations, the habits of deduction by which it is most significantly possessed. For James the conscious artistic process began with the discovery of a possible subject. The hint usually came as an accident —the hearing of a chance phrase; the learning of an unusual combination of incidents whose causual relationships lay hidden. Such discoveries were somewhat fortuitous, and yet they could come only to the person who was prepared to recognise them. Wordsworth would have granted them only to the poet who had

thought long and deeply. With, perhaps, little difference in total meaning James would have used the verb felt. James's autobiographic writing implies that he early recognized such a habit. Though in his reminiscences he is looking back from the vantage of long years of novel writing, his recall is probably in the main correct. In later years, wherever he heard an intriguing anecdote, James almost instantaneously started it on its way toward transubstantiation in art.

As a writer must use one or another metaphor to help him with his thinking, James employed, among various others, the concept of the growth of a plant. His narratives began for him as "germs" which he called "the fascinations of the fabulist's art". As regards the origin of such "germs" James suggested: "Is n't it all we can say that they come from every quarter of heaven, that they are there at almost any turn of the road? They accumulate, and we are always picking them over, selecting among them. They are the breath of life — by which I mean that life, in its own way, breathes them upon us. They are so, in a manner prescribed and imposed — floated into our minds by the current of life." [47]

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47. AN, pp. 42-43
    Cf. Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader I
    "Modern Fiction", p. 45

The anecdote, however, short or long was not quite itself the "germ". The mind of the novelist created the living cell; the actual fact merely set the mind to work. And the plant in the beginning, was of indeterminate nature, the novelist sometimes having not the faintest clue as to what its final flowering would be. In the Preface to The American James noted: "There always has been, for the valid work of art, a history".[48] That history had to begin even before the novelist became aware of his subject. It consisted of the process going on unendingly in his mind as he reflected on all that he had seen, read and heard. The mind was always at work remoulding the world that the novelist had come to know. In other words, before the novelist can use his impressions, he had to feel unifying themes linking them together. This "unification of impressions" is the key point in James's theory of fiction as well as in his own practice. He attempted this synthesis at a very early stage in his career, and his subsequent work developed with increasing subtlety and beauty, variations on these original themes. Eventually, to judge from his notebooks, the creative expression became for James a process in which he yielded himself up completely to the aesthetic situations

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48. AN, p. 28

projected by his imagination. To enter this world of imagination was to leave the world of the habitual and common place, to explore beyond appearances, to enquire with leisure and freedom into relations, motivations, general conditions.

In discussing Flaubert's approach to his subjects James wrote that the novelist "has on the one side to feel his subject and on the other side to render it .... The more he feels his subject the more he can render it .... The more he renders it the more he can feelt it".[49] With Flaubert the emphasis was on the rendering. For James the feeling of the subject came first, and it controlled the selection and discrimination. Feeling for James was not basically different from thinking. It represented the impression which one had of the relationships of things, an impression which, if orderly, had a dominant tone. If an incident or situation was irrelevant to the tone, it was rejected. Obviously, the vaster the novelist's reflective experience, the greater would be the range of the separate impressions which must be sorted and synthesized before he could be content with his ultimate tone.

While discussing the theoretic aspects of the transmutation of the substance we may as well refer to James's ideas

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49. HF, pp. 215-16

about the "romantic" and the "realistic". In his Preface to The American James asks the question : "By what art or mystery, what craft of selection, omission or commission, does a given picture of life appear to us to surround its theme, its figure and images, with the air of romance while another picture close beside it may effect us as steeping the whole matter in the element of reality"?[50] James himself answers the query that it is ultimately the question of "perceived effect": "The determining condition would at any rate seem so latent that one may well doubt if the full artistic consciousness ever reached it; leaving the matter thus a case, ever,not of an author's plotting and planning and calculating, but just of his feeling and seeing, of his conceiving,in a word, and of his thereby inevitably expressing himself, under the influence of one value or the other."[51]

Art actually can only achieve the illusion of life and can achieve it only by the "authority" of the writer, including conviction, belief and acceptance in the reader. James is constantly preoccupied with this problem of plausibility. He found it, however, difficult to define the limits of plausibility, of probability in Aristotle's sense. James often recognizes the

50. AN, p. 30
51. Ibid., p. 31

distinction between the novel and the romance: he ranks the romance lower, thinks it an excuse "to relieve the writer of all analysis of character, to enable him to forge his interest out of the exhibition of circumstance rather than out of the examination of motive".[52] But in later years he treated "romance" and "romanticism" with increasing tenderness. He admired Stevenson quite inordinately both as a heroic person and as an accomplished writer with style and imagination; he appreciated Rostand and his happy romantic principle, though wondering and anxious at his "deflection from reality."[53] James after his wear and tear in the art of selection and discrimination realised with Conrad that the "fairy-tale" (and all that goes with it) is a part of human heritage and should not be dispensed with from any genuine work of art.[54]

It was the realization of this mixed stream of 'romance' and 'realism' in great writers that led to James's significant pronouncement in the Preface to The American:

> Of the men of largest responding imagination before the human scene, of Scott, of Balzac, even of the coarse, comprehensive, prodigious Zola, we feel, I think, that the deflexion towards either quarter has never taken place; that neither the nature of the man's faculty nor the nature of his experience has ever quite determined it. His current remains therefore

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52. NR, p. 34, 35
53. The Scenic Art, ed. Allen Wade 'New Burnswick, 1948),p.322-24
54. Joseph Conrad, Tales of Hearsay & Last Essays, "John Galsworthy", p. 126

> extraordinarily rich and mixed, washing us successively with the warm wave of the near and familiar and the tonic shock, as may be, of the far and strange. (The real represents to my perception the things we cannot possibly not know, sooner or later, in one way or another .... The romantic stands, on the other hand, for the things that, with all the facilities in the world, all the wealth and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure, we never can directly know; the thing that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and our desire. 55

This verdict testifies to James's compromise between sheer romance and blantant realism. True art, James emphasised, embodies the mixed stream of realism and romance but an artistic blend is the work of a true genius.

The Craft of Fiction :

Critics of Henry James have amply recognized his sense of "structure" and the importance of his theories about technique and craftsmanship. But this recognition has been made without the sort of particularization that has enriched our study of poetry or drama. It would, therefore, be relevant to consider James's idea of "Action and Character", "Centre of Consciousness" and "Dramatic Method" in a novel.[56]

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55. AN, p. 31,32

56. I am indebted to Mr. R.W. Short for some points made in "Some critical Terms of Henry James" in PMLA, Vol. LXV, of Sept., 1950.

As regards action and character in a novel, James believed that a story succeeds in proportion to the quantity of its content that is represented to the reader; that is, the author must also show events in the act of happening, and character in the process of registering, instead of merely turning in reports, even though he may be able to make his reports as stirring as those of the messenger to Job: That which was to be represented, James called the "Action". His concept of the action of a story was very close to Aristotle's concept of plot in tragedy: James spoke of the action as "embodied" in the scenes which comprise the plot, which follows Aristotle's definition of the plot as the "structure of the incidents", which are themselves" the imitation of an action".[57]

Action and character, for James, interacted to the point of fusion. "I could think so little", he said, "of any situation that didn't depend for its interest upon the nature of the persons situated, and thereby on their way of taking it".[58] And conversely, "the agents in any drama are interesting only in proportion as they feel their respective situations; since the consciousness, on their part, of the complication exhibited forms for us their link of connection with it".[59] On the same point

57. The Poetics (Butcher's edition)
58. AN, p. 44
59. Ibid., p. 62

he had written many years earlier in his essay "The Art of Fiction" wherein he ridiculed the old-fashioned distinction between "the novel of character" and "the novel of incident". To him 'Character' and 'incident' were intertwined in a truly genuine piece of art (i.e. novel): "What is character but the determination of incident ? What is incident but the illustration of Character?" [60]

James specified his conception of action more than once. Of "The Cage" he wrote, "The action of the drama is simply the girl's subjective adventure .... (It is) a course of incident complicated by the intervention of winged wit".[61] This description was to apply also to the more important title of the volume What Maisie Knew, in which James showed himself completely unmoved by our natural efforts to locate the plot in the objective, physical events of the story — Maisie's desertion by her parents, the "rescue" by her step-parents, the intervention of Mrs. Wise and so on. Here the action is the full history of Maisie's knowing, or what she knew from stage to stage. What she found out at the end is the story's catastrophe. We may define this line of events as co-existing with the physical plot, though there seems no real need beyond

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60. HF, p. 34

61. AN, p. 157

old custom, of conceding such a quasi-structural existence to these mere materials.

While discussing the principles or perspective with which James approached the creation of a work of fiction, we have also to consider his idea of "the central consciousness". Usually James's earliest and often exceedingly primitive glimpse of his subject came to him as an incident or situation, though a few stories began with a vague image of a character. But however the impulse came, he immediately blocked out the action in reference to its effect upon character. The primary necessity, therefore, was the creation of one or more persons who had acute sensibility. And James proceeded to construct a world as they saw it. Only by so doing could he explore reality.

To the urbane gentleman that Henry James was, the elements of life were such as to any other urbane gentleman. Some things were convenient, some frustrating; some flattered the ego, and some lashed it. But according to James, the writer-hero lives an ordinary existence socially but his true life is in the hidden chambers of his imagination. It was only when James had conceived of a character possessed of a sensitive mind,

equipped with a personal history, and confronted with a fundamental situation that he could best order and refine his own feeling and thought.

The writing of a work of fiction was the deepest possible experience of his spirit because only by seeing through the consciousness of a character could he comprehend any action in its fulness. In Roderick Hudson it is Rowland Mallet who has appreciation, though the story narrates the history of Roderick; the "centre of interest" is in Mallet's consciousness and "the drama is the very drama of that consciousness".[62] In The Portrait of a Lady, though James did at times briefly shift his point of view, he generally adhered to the method, which he afterwards described in the Preface, of placing "the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness" and being concerned with "her relation to herself".[63] Those whom James called mirrors or registers were "intense perceivers, all, of their respective predicaments".[64] Hence his concern to see life as they saw it. If they were registers, they, too must be limited in perspective, even in perceiving their own predicaments. In his Preface to The Ambassadors, James spoke of Strether's "note" as "the note of

62. AN, p. 16
63. AN, p. 51
64. Ibid., p. 71

discrimination, just as his drama is to become, under stress, the drama of discrimination".[65]

We should note that the reader does not always catch the register in the act of registering. James often "foreshortens" by condensing less important or preparative material, though even here he almost always limits himself strictly to material the reflector either knows or has been acquiring. In his Preface to The Princess Casamassima, James brings out this problem of "foreshortening" in a lively discussion :

> There are threads (in a story) shorter and less tense, and I am far from implying that the minor, the coarser and less fruitful forms and degrees of moral reaction ... may not yield lively results. They have their subordinate, illustrative values—that appeal of the witless which is often so penetrating. Verily even, I think, no "story" is possible without its fools.... At the same time I confess I never see the leading interest of any human hazard but in a consciousness (on the part of the moved and moving creature) subject to fine intensification and wide enlargement. It is as mirrored in that consciousness that the gross fools, the headlong fools, the fatal fools play their part for us — they have much less to show us in themselves. 66

Obviously, what James implies here is that "the shorter and less tense" threads play their part only in the total perspective of the central character's consciousness.

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65. AN, p. 316

66. Ibid., pp. 66-67

James was so much interested in "rendering" life that he kept on reflecting on all the possible methods of presentation throughout his literary career. As early as 1868 he found it "good to think of an observer aloof, the critic, the idle commentator of it all, taking notes, as we may say, in the interest of truth".[67] Both in theory and in practice as a novelist, he emphasized more and more a single focus of consciousness, a single point of view, a "central light".[68] The "point of view", as we have found, is not just a technical device serving the "economy of treatment" permitting "recording consistency".[69] It serves to heighten the consciousness of the character and hence to increase the reader's identification with him. Ultimately it is another device to achieve the general effect of illusion. "The figures in any picture, the agents in any drama, are interesting only in proportion as they feel their respective situations".[70] They must therefore be "intense perceivers"[71] to serve this purpose. This insistence on the mind and intellect of the "reflector" explains James's criticism of both Madame Bovary and L'Education Sentimentale. Emma Bovary suffers from the

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67. VR, p. 135
68. AN, p. 130
69. AN, p. 300
70. Ibid., p. 62
71. Ibid., p. 71

"poverty of her consciousness" and Frederic Moreau is a nonetity, an "unconsciousness". It was a mistake to present Madame Arnoux only through Moreau's eyes, "a moral mistake", since Flaubert did not even realize that he made it.[72]

Everything depends on the quality of the consciousness and on the mere device of the focus or an intermediary narrator. James thus did not approve of the technique of Conrad's Chance since he apparently did not admire the mind of Marlow. He thought the book "an exhibition of method" and Conrad "a votary of the way to do a thing that shall make it undergo most doing".[73] This seems to describe James's own technique in later years, though not apparently in James's mind. He thought that in Conrad (whom he admired for other reasons) "objectivity is definitely compromised" by the complex reference to several narrators. There is a "baffled relation" between the subject-matter and its emergence which we find constituted by the circumvolations of Chance.[74]

When James embarked upon his last group of novels and his critical prefaces he was free to tackle the subject which really interested him. It was in the effort to "dramatize" his

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72. NN, pp. 83-87
73. NN, p. 345
74. Ibid., pp. 349-355

subject that he made his great discoveries in dramatic form and technique. It is true that by rejecting the theatre as he found it he also rejected some of the limitations which any theatre imposes on drama. He clearly luxuriates in this freedom, multiplying his discriminations, taking his time, putting out of patience a large group of readers who accuse him of verbosity and hair-splitting. His novels are not literally dramas. Yet both the texture of the writing and the large outlines of the form are truly dramatic.

In his criticism of "the dramatic method" James very often speaks of "picture" and "scene" which illustrate his theory more clearly than his abstract terms. Percy Lubbock makes much of the distinction between "picture" and "scene" which James mentions several times in his prefaces. He writes :

> It is the method of picture making that enables a novelist to cover his great spaces of life and quantities of experience so much greater than any that can be brought within the acts of a play.... The limitation of drama is as obvious as its peculiar power. It is clear that if we wish to see an abundance and multitude of life we shall find it more readily and summarily by looking for an hour into a memory, a consciousness, than by merely watching the present events of an hour, however crowded .... But it needs a mind to create that vista. 75

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75. Quoted by Francis Fergusson in "James's Idea of Dramatic Form" The Kenyon Review, Vol. V (1943) p. 499

A novelist may and often does break down and tell all, which a writer for the stage never can. In this sense the novelist commands a source not available to the dramatist. But this resource, so conceived, James disdained. He felt how easily it degenerated into mere formless loquacity. He preferred to dramatize the picture too, by viewing it through a consciousness different from his own, that of a character in the drama. The method is that of a dramatist and if we look at a drama which contains "great spaces of life and quantities of experience" we can see the dramatist employing it. James, as we have seen, almost invariably used a fine intelligence to give us the clue to the other characters and to the issues and values of his dramas. The problem and solution both belong to drama, and good drama is full of Jamesian "reflectors". Enobarbus in Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra is one. He not only shows us what to think of Antony and Cleopatra at various moments, he also sums up the impression of the whole scene for us several times and at the end. It is not too much to say that the scene is composed and pulled together for us in Enobarbus's consciousness of it. Shakespeare thus, according to Jamesian theory, uses Enobarbus both as "reflector" and "compositional centre" for this scene.

This is only to suggest that the device was known to earlier masters of literature but James was, perhaps, the first self-conscious writer to explore its resources. It will be noticed that the three aspects of "scene" upon which his own "dramas" are constituted ("Logic", "unit" and "general consistency") appear to be of different orders. The logic of the scene, as James used the expression, would seem to apply only to part of a given work, but this part in relationship with the other parts: "The point is that the scenic passages are wholly and logically scenic...." Not merely passages of dramatic dialogue, they have for their rule of beauty the principle of the 'conduct', the organic development, of a scene (Proper to a scene) — the entire succession of values that flower and bear fruit on ground solidly laid for them".[76] The rule of beauty of the scene, then, enables it to flower and bear fruit on ground laid by non-scenic elements in the drama. The unit of the scene doubtless refers to the self-unity of this separable scenic part, what we might in a strict use of the word call a single scene —— a dramatic meeting and exchange among characters.

What James meant by "general scenic consistency" we may learn from his exposition of The Wings of the Dove. Turning to that preface, we find that he made no significant use of the

76. AN, p. 158

term 'scene', but carried on the discussion in terms of blocks of material, each with its appropriate centre and each attempting a balanced, vital relationship to the problem of the whole. We may therefore interpret "general scenic consistency" as referring to the organisation of the whole in terms of blocks which obey the "scenic law", though not recognizable as scenic units.[77] The expression embodies the Jamesian equivalent of the dramatic unities - the sum-total of the forces making the whole work cohere in a completely unified aesthetic organism.

The "standard scene", then, treats of all the submitted material, all that has been amassed by the preparative passages and all that exists "in the hour" between the characters participating in the scene. It must be of a certain magnitude, with its own beginning, middle and end, or "logical start, logical turn, and logical finish".[78] It must be principally dialogue, or dialogue and narrative, because its laws are, as we see, based on time rather than on space. It must never become static, since it bears the heavy responsibility of communicating to the fiction its illusion of delicately surging life, that is, to use the term James insisted upon, life which

77. AN, pp. 296 ff.

78. In a letter to Mrs. Everard Cotes (January 26, 1900) James had opined on her novel His Honor and a Lady: "I think your drama lacks, a little, line —bony structure and palpable, as it were, tense cord — on which to string the pearls of detail. It's the frequent fault of women's work ..." SL, p. 242

is "represented" not merely reported. This is, of course, the ultimate achievement of James's multiplied indirections, that his works breathe deeply and rhythmically. And the word "rhythmically" echoes James's own estimate of the effect of his alternating structure:

> The treatment by "scene" regularly, quite rhythmically recurs; the intervals between, the massing of the elements to a different effect and by a quite other law, remain, in this fashion, all preparative, just as the scenic occasions in themselves become, at a given moment, illustrative, each of the agents, true to its function, taking up the theme from the other very much as the fiddles, in an orchestra, may take it up from the cornets and flutes, or the wind-instrument take it up from the violins. 79

The inhale and exhale of breathing make it an acceptable metaphor for describing James's kind of structure, but it fails to accentuate the distinction between that and such another highly conscious organic structure as the one based on the stream of consciousness technique. The effect of the latter suggests a continuum without any pulsation, except of an effective rather than structural kind. This difference again emphasizes James's moral bent: he finds significant only that experience which is qualified by the will and expressed in action; his structure accumulates subsidiary material in accordance with his "other

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79. AH, pp. 157-58

law"; the scene with its higher principles dramatizes those actions which are the consequence of free choice.

Though James's pictures contain great life and, often, physical movements, they must perform their stint of representation in space rather than in time. They must foreshorten, summarise, and thereby give the effect of the simultaneous representation. Their life must flow into the scene. Hence they must eschew, or appear to eschew, chronological narration and character representation of the detachable kind.

Form of the Novel :

Henry James was a votary of "form" from the very beginning of his literary career. But whereas in the early phase he pleaded for a harmony between "form" and "substance", in his later years he fanatically adhered to "form for form's sake". This preoccupation with "form" both in theory and his novelistic practice led him to champion the cause of the "well-made Novel" and condemn the "New Novel". In a letter to Witter Bynner in 1906 he wrote contemptuously :

> The sacred truth is that, being now almost in my 100th year, with a long and weary experience of such matters behind me, promiscuous fiction has become abhorrent to me, and I find it the hardest thing in the world to read almost any new novel. 80

80. SL, p. 191 (Italics mine)
James's reference to his 100th year is just an emphasis on "the great backward reach of his memory". (Leon Edel)

But the letter to Hugh Walpole (May 19th., 1912) is the culmination of Jamesian obsession with "form" and his blindness towards the graces of style and craftsmanship in other novelists. He writes :

> Don't let any one persuade you —that strenuous selection and comparison are not the very essence of art, and that Form is (not) substance to that degree that there is absolutely no substance without it. Form alone takes, and holds and preserves substance — saves it from the welter of helpless verbiage that we swim in as in a sea of tasteless tepid pudding, and that makes one ashamed of an art capable of such degradations. Tolstoi and D (ostoevskie) are fluid pudding, though not tasteless, because the amount of their own minds and souls in solution in the broth gives it savour and flavour thanks to the strong, rank quality of their genius and their experience. But there are all sorts of things to be said of them, and in particular that we see how great a vice is their lack of composition, their defiance of economy and architecture, directly they are emulated and imitated; then, as subjects of emulation models, they quite give themselves away. There is nothing so deplorable as a work of art with a lack in its interest; and there is no such lack of interest as through commonness of form. 81

While writing this letter James apparently felt exasperated with his devotion to the art of novel and his criticism of the craft of fiction which had brought him nothing but jibes from his contemporaries. He thus vindicated his position by challenging

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81. SL, pp. 201-202
(Italics mine)

those masters who were being emulated by the critics and imitated by the younger generation of writers.

In this context, it is interesting to note the changes in James's criticism of the novel in his later works. In his essay "The Art of Fiction" (1884) he commended the "organism" of the novel as a harmonious whole[82] and held 'substance' to be more important than 'form'.[83] It was the fruitful era of James as a novelist and as a critic. "The Art of Fiction" and The Portrait of a Lady embody the best of James's literary endeavours in either fields and serve as a standard for measuring his later achievements. Judged thus the last novels of James — The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl and his Prefaces present him in a highly sophisticated and rarefied atmosphere. To add to this, James started behaving like a martyred hero, as one who had been sacrificed by the mere philistines of art. The realists who had driven the art of the novel of its "bankrupt state"[84] were as much responsible for the degeneration as the so-called Russian masters. The Preface to The Tragic Muse once again highlights James's frustration :

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82. HF, p. 34
83. HF, p. 29
84. Ibid., p. 79

> A picture without composition slights its most precious chance for beauty, and is moreover not composed at all unless the painter knows how that principle of health and safety, working as an absolutely premeditated art, has prevailed. There may in its absence be life, incontestably as The Newcomes has life, as Les Trois Mousquetaires, as Tolstoi's Peace and War have it, but what do such large loose baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitray, artistically mean? ... We look in vain for the artist, the divine explanatory genius .... I delight in deep-breathing economy and an organic form. 85

The comments on Thackeray, Dumas and in particular on Tolstoy show that James held a narrower view of form and even kept, an untenable divorce between 'form' and 'substance' when confronted with works of art in a different tradition. He obviously did not recognize the complex composition and stylistic mastery of Tolstoy since it was another kind of 'form' and 'style' than Turgenev's or his own.

Theoretically James seems perfectly aware of the unity of 'content' and 'form'. He complains of "the perpetual clumsy assumption that subject and style are —— aesthetically speaking, or in the living work —— different and separable things".[86] He often argues that "the grave distinction between substance and form in a really wrought work of art signally breaks down," that it is impossible "to mark any joint or seam", or to

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85. AN, p. 84 86. FN, p. 229

"disintegrate a synthesis" such as his own novel The Awkward Age.[87] It is the highest praise for him to say of Madame Bovary that

> ... the form is in itself as interesting, as active, as much of the essence of the subject as the idea, and yet so close is its fit and so inseparable its life that we catch it at no moment on any errand of its own. That verily is to be interesting — all round, that is to be genuine and whole. The work is a classic because the thing, such as it is, is ideally done, and because it shows that in such doing eternal beauty may dwell. [88]

The harmony of 'form' and 'substance' is James's constant requirement. Except in the last few years of his literary career when he was obsessed with the idea of 'form', he always stood for a marriage between 'form' and 'content'. It is because of the inseparability of the two that he considered translations impossible and disliked being translated. He wrote to a prospective translator most discouragingly: "I feel that in a literary work of the least complexity the very form and texture are the substance itself and that the flesh is indetachable from the bones! Translation is an effort — though a most flattering one! to tear the hapless flesh".[89]

87. AN, p. 115-16
88. NN, p. 80
89. SL, p. 136

"Form" in James's theory means most often composition, architecture e.g. the right distribution of conversation, narration, and pictorial matter. He finds Howell deficient in it[90] and lauds his own The Ambassadors as "the most proportioned of his productions" along side The Portrait of a Lady, which is a "structure reared with an 'architectural' competence".[91] But James also often contrasts 'form' in the sense of composition with "texture" and "style". Texture is something else than style. Dumas, George Sand, Trollope "weave a loose web", while Balzac "weaves a dense one". The "tissue of his tales is always extraordinarily firm and hard" and even shows "fantastic cohesiveness".[92] But texture is not style and style is not form. "Madame Sand's novels have plenty of style, but they have no form. Balzac's have not a shred of style, but they have a great deal of form".[93]

"Form" in Jamesian terminology (inspite of some shifts in connotation) means a kind of structural unity and cohesion. As he says in "The Art of Fiction": "A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the other parts there is something of each of the other parts".[94]

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90. AE, p. 155
91. AN, p. 52
92. FPN, pp. 75-80
93. FPN, p. 180
94. HF, p. 34

Unity is a requirement of organic art, but in a proper organistic theory it is unity in variety, an inner, living unity. James recognizes this when he praises Flaubert for being "the devotee of the phrase" which is "properly part of something else that is in turn part of something other, part of a reference, a tone, a passage, a page".[95] He praises Silas Marner because it has "that simple, rounded, consummate aspect, that absence of loose ends and gaping issues, which marks a classical work".[96] Daniel Deronda is described, in an appreciative dialogue, as a "two centre novel"[97] and War and Peace, he complains, has no "centre of interest"[98] James's criticism of The Ring and the Book assumes the same rigid standard; James proposes to retell Browning's story from a single point of view, the consciousness of Caponsacchi.[99] James, one fears, violates here his own rule to grant the artist his theme, as Browning's main interest was precisely in the multiplicity of perspectives from which he told his story several times over.

Unity is not only unity of perspective, but also of tone in James. Reflecting on Balzac's Cure de Village James

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95. NN, p. 93
96. VR, p. 8
97. PP, p. 65 ff.
98. NN, p. 329
99. NN, pp. 394-95

complains of the "fatal break of 'tone', the one unpardonable sin for the novelist",[100] about the middle of the book, while he praises Gautier's travel books : "Each of his chapters of travel has a perfect tone of its own and that unity of effect which is the secret of the rarest artists".[101] The analogy to a painting, its "keeping", its harmony is again in James's mind. "Form","unity", "tone", create illusion, the illusion of a "world". Mrs. Gaskell's Wives and Daughters has "reared a new and arbitrary world over (the reader's) heedless head —— a world insidiously inclusive of him (such is the assoupissement of his critical sense), complete in every particular".[102] But this illusory world of fiction (and art in general) must be, James feels, a joyous and good world. That is why he chides Turgenev for his gloom and Flaubert for his hatred of the bourgeoise and his tortured martyrdom for style. James could, in his early years, say even somewhat crudely : "To be completely great, a work of art must lift up the reader's heart", and "life is dispiriting; art is inspiring".[103] Similarly James remonstrates with Vernon Lee about her novel Miss Brown, that "life is less criminal, less obnoxious, less objectionable, less crude, more bon efant, more mixed and casual and even in its most offensive manifestations, more pardonable"[104] than it

100. HH, p. 118
101. FPH, p. 43
102. NR, p. 154
103. NR, pp. 225-26
104. SL, p. 238

appears in her novel. Flaubert's intense "hatred" surprise and distress James. "How can art be so genuine and yet so unconsoled, so unhumorous, so unsociable? How can it be such a curse without being also a blessing? ... why, in short, when the struggle is success, should the success not be at least serenity"?[105] James cannot share Flaubert's "puerile dread of the grocer, the bourgeois .... That worthy citizen ought never to have kept a poet from dreaming".[106] Bouvard et Pecuchet, James felt, "is surely, in the extreme juvenility of its main idea, one of the oddest productions for which a man who had lived long in the world was ever responsible".[107] Flaubert's hatred of his public was so excessive that it amounted to a betrayal of art. "He hovered for ever at the public door .... He should at least have listened at the chamber of the soul".[108]

The tone of self consolation is obvious. James himself discouraged by the growing indifference to his work, retired more and more into the chamber of the soul. But he never became cynical in his attitude to life. Inspite of his awareness of evil, he preserved an ideal of optimism, of serenity, of trust in nature and human nature, a final almost olympian perspective. This temper, so curiously similar to his brother's

105. EL, p. 126
106. EL, p. 146
107. EL, p. 159
108. EL, pp. 149-50

and father's, is also at the root of his aesthetics, which is in its basic positions, organistic, illusionist, i.e. asking the artist to create a world which is somehow like life and to create it on the analogy of nature in order to support man in a belief in the moral and social order of the universe. On these two points, aesthetics and general temper of serenity, the parallel to Goethe seems striking. James, we must remember, had praised Goethe as the "great critic" and he had early written a review of Wilhelm Meister in which he voiced his admiration, inspite of many reservations regarding Goethe's novelistic skill, for Goethe's power of creating human beings, for "the luminous atmosphere of justice which fills the book".

Intelligence, reality, "nature" which is also form and illusion in art, the joy of art and its civilising power, are also James's preoccupations. James almost alone in his time and place in the English speaking world holds fast to the insights of organistic aesthetics and thus constitutes a bridge from the early nineteenth century to modern criticism.

James the Impressionist :

The foregoing discussion proves, quite distinctly, I hope, the uniqueness of Henry James's position among the English

critics of the novel. Although his immediate predecessors showed some awareness of the problems of the art of fiction and questions such as the use of fiction, the role of imagination in the writing of fiction and the correspondence of fiction to life outside the novel preoccupied their artistic minds, their criticism was still in its adolescence. The notion of the novel as a distinct literary form having something to do with art could not gain ground earlier than the last two decades of the nineteenth century. As such, inspite of Mr. Richard Stang's[109] heroic attempts to prove the critical consciousness of the mid-Victorians it may not be an exaggeration to say that nineteenth century criticism of fiction remained immature. It was left to Henry James and his worthy successors — Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford and D.H. Lawrence — to raise it to the status of one of the most distinguished of literary arts.

Given his liberal education and 'saturation' in the works of great masters —— Balzac, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Scott, Dickens and George Eliot —— James was on surer grounds as a critic of the novel. His knowledge of the French critics stood him in good turn in defining the scope and function of the novel. He is the first of the self-conscious critics to whom

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109. Richard Stang, The Theory of the Novel in England (1850-1870) (London, 1962)

we owe some of the best ideas that were said or thought about the craft of fiction. He can be regarded as one of these artist- aestheticians, endowed with seminal minds, who always bring to bear on their theories the concreteness of their own practice. Both as a critic and as a novelist, James is seldom tired of comparing and discriminating the English novel with French and Russian masterpieces. His criticism of the English and the French novel in The House of Fiction and his evaluation of the French and English theatre in The Scenic Art remind us of the critical methods in Dryden's Essay of Dramatic Poesy. James had the same insight, penetration and deep understanding of literary problems as Dryden, though he restricts himself only to the novel. With Matthew Arnold he shares the magnanimity of mind and catholicity of vision. Finally, like the Victorian mentor, he is also waging a perpetual war against the philistinism of his age.

James lays great emphasis on the personality of the artist. He does not believe in the neo-classical doctrine of "methodising" nature in the image of past masters. He would grant the artist the freedom of mind and soul to discover the world for himself and to represent it according to his own

sensibility. But he would not permit any indulgence in sensations and impressions for their own sake. Everything has to be selected, discriminated and given 'a local habitation and a name'. Thus James appears to be striking a balance between eighteenth century 'rigidity' and nineteenth century 'fluidity', if I may be permitted to use such terms. He is with the romantics in his belief in the freedom of the artist and the role of imagination but he is on the side of the Impressionists in his views about "Form" and "Manner".

James unfailingly reveals the specific living source of his most general precept. He knew that only by constantly retaining the specific in the field of discussion could he ever establish or maintain the principles by which he wrote. That is his unique virtue as a critic, that the specific object is always in hand; as it was analogously his genius as a novelist that what he wrote about was always present in somebody's specific knowledge of it. In neither capacity did he ever succumb to the "platitude of statement".

It is this factor of material felt and rendered specifically that differentiates James from such writers as Joyce and Proust. All three have exerted great influence on

succeeding writers, as masters ought. The difference is that writers who follow Joyce or Proust tend to absorb their subjects, their social attitudes, and their personal styles and accomplish competent derivative work in so doing, while the followers of James absorb something of a technical mastery good for any subject, any attitude, any style. It is the difference between absorbing the object of a sensibility and acquiring something comparable to the sensibility itself. Through his theory and practice in the art of the novel, James has made consistently every sacrifice for intelligibility and form.

Considering the range of Henry James's criticism and his long career as a novelist, it might be possible to distinguish between the critical attitudes of the earlier phase and theoretical tenets of the later . His first review appeared in 1864 and his last article The New Novel in 1914. It is difficult to consider this span of fifty years as a unity. There are shifts of doctrine and marked changes of style. The earliest stage of James's reviewing in the Nation and the North American Review in 1864-66 is significant in being more pronouncedly moral and intellectual in attitude.James, saturated in French criticism, felt somewhat dissatisfied with

English and American fiction, charged their authors with superficiality, formlessness and lack of proportion. His puritanical bias was equally evident. Such reviews as on Dickens's Our Mutual Friend (1865), Hardy's Far From the Madding Crowd (1874) and Zola's Nana (1880) reveal these attitudes most glaringly. The last writings which coincide with the turn of the century are often overrun by 'Cobwebs', elaborate and sometimes strangely empty circumlocutions. The Prefaces written to enlighten the younger generation and to serve as "a sort of comprehensive manual" for aspirants in the art of the novel, smack of such obsession with technique and preoccupations with over-elaborate art. But between the two extreme phases we have, perhaps, the best of James as a critic — between, roughly speaking, the years 1880-1905. "The Art of Fiction" (1884), "The Great Form" (1889); "The Future of the Novel" (1899) are some of his best pieces of literary criticism. And his critique of novelists in such essays as "Robert Louis Stevenson" (1887), "Guy de Maupassant" (1888), "Turgenev and Tolstoy"(1897), "Gustave Flaubert" (1902), "Emile Zola" (1903) and "The Lesson of Balzac" (1905) are some of the remarkable expositions of the art of fiction and most penetrating criticism of some of the

finest masters of fiction. No historian of the art of the novel can ever lose sight of these contributions. They, undoubtedly present the consecrated formulary of Jamesian faith. These essays also show the remarkable coherence and consistency in James's theory and practice during these years.

Judging from the point of view of his contemporaries, James very often appears to be quite pompous and seems to be posing as a self-styled master of the craft. Hardy's stricture on James as one who has a "ponderously warn manner of saying nothing in infinite sentences" and H.G. Wells's harsh judgement of his being a "powerful hippopotamus trying to pick up a pea", derive their origin from James's over-exposition of his genius, his concern to convert the "non-believers" to his own creed. The pontifical tone of his criticism, his avowal of "compression", "discrimination", "economy" and "dramatization" seemed ridiculous to his contemporaries, who viewed the failure of their application to his own art. James's preoccupation with "sensations", "passions", "impulses" and "motives", his meanderings in the many notion of "central consciousness" and his battle-cry of "saturation" and "immersion", made him a butt of ridicule among his younger contemporaries. Barring Joseph

Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, the majority of English writers felt sore at his crusading mission. No wonder, then, Hardy, Oscar Wilde, H.G. Wells and Max Beerbohm all felt inclined to ridicule the "master" as James loved to be called by the votaries of art in the novel.

But, despite such unfortunate utterances (which were in most cases personal), James stands distinguished among critics of the English novel. Not only that he has opened new vistas in the art of the novel and has brought new standards and criteria for judging the works of art in fiction, he has also contributed greatly to the vocabulary of modern fiction criticism. Terms such as 'consciousness', 'reflector', 'minor', 'central intelligence', 'picture', 'scene' 'rendering', 'illumination', 'form', 'unity', 'tone', 'type', 'case', '<u>discernibles</u>', '<u>Ficelles</u>', 'illusion', 'discrimination', 'beauty of action', 'poetry of effect', 'operative irony', 'receptive lucidity', 'principle of composition' etc. etc. are our most valuable heritage from James's criticism. In this respect he can be compared with Coleridge who too is credited with importing and coining new terms for the appreciation and criticism of poetry.

Henry James scrupled relentlessly as to the minor aspects of his art but of its major and essential character his knowledge was calm, full and ordered. As Blackmur in his Introduction to The Art of the Novel (1934) points out, one answer to almost every question will be found, given always in specific terms and flowing from illustrative example, somewhere in his criticism;[110] and if the answer he gives is not the only one, nor to some minds necessarily the right one, it has yet the paramount merit that it results from a thoroughly consistent, informed mind operating at its greatest stretch. James's advice to 'the nymphs and swaines' of the Deerfield Summer School (1889) aptly sum up his theory of impressionism in fiction :

> Oh, do something from Your point of view; an ounce of example is worth a ton of generalities; do something with the great art and the great form: do something with life. Any point of view is interesting that is a direct impression of life. You each have an impression coloured by your individual conditions; make that into a picture, a picture framed by your own personal wisdom, your glimpse of the American world. The field is vast for freedom, for study, for observation, for satire, for truth.
>
> "I have only two little words for the matter remotely approaching to rule or doctrine; one is life and the other is freedom. [111]

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110. AN, Introduction, pp. XXXVII-XXXVIII

111. HF, pp. 46-47 (Italics mine)

JOSEPH CONRAD

I) ... art itself may be defined as a single minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect.

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel ——it is, before all, to make you see. That —— and no more, and it is everything.

(Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus, 1897)

II) All creative art is magic, is evocation of the unseen in forms persuasive, enlightening, familiar and surprising, for the edification of mankind.

("Henry James", 1905)

Chapter Four

JOSEPH CONRAD

Joseph Conrad is one of the few English novelists who deserves our attention both as a creative writer as well as a critic of considerable significance. He may be regarded as the central figure among English Impressionists. Though his friends and earlier reviewers such as Edward Garnett, Richard Curle, Hugh Walpole and Ford Madox Ford did much to highlight his art and craftsmanship, Conrad criticism during the first two or three decades of the present century remained more impressionistic than analytical. From the 'thirties, however, a growing awareness of Conrad's art with reference to his critical utterances became more pronounced. These studies of Conrad present appraisals of the novelist, reminiscences of the man and assessment of his work in general and also with reference to individual works. They represent multiple literary approaches: the biographical, the psychological, the aesthetic in chronological or analytical way. But few of these critical works were meant to be a study of Conrad's theory of fiction. As such they shed little light on the novelist's views on the art of novel and other literary genres.

The reasons for the neglect of this aspect of Conrad's work are not far to seek. Conrad in his characteristic manner talks disparagingly of theories, principles and formulas. In one of his earliest critical essays he had said :

> It is in the impartial practice of life, if anywhere that the promise of perfection for his (the novelist's) art can be found, rather than in the absurd formulae trying to prescribe this or that particular method of technique or conception. 1

Again, he wrote in A Personal Record :

> I, who have never sought in the written work anything else but a form of the beautiful ... have carried over that spread from the decks of the ships to the more circumscribed space of my desk, and by that act, I suppose I have become permanently imperfect in the ineffable company of pure esthetes. 2

Somehow in his letters and essays Conrad gives the impression of a genius inspired by some mysterious creative faculty rather than a self-conscious artist following recognized masters in the craft. His biographer M.C. Jean-Aubry thinks of some "mysteries which cannot be penetrated" and the workings of his mind seem to elude him. Similarly, his first discoverer Edward Garnett thinks that Conrad's art was intuitive and not "the fruit of considered theory":

> Conrad worked by intuition after a preliminary meditation just as his criticism of other men's work was intuitive and not the fruit of considered theory. He was, of course, always interested in literary technique and good craftsmanship such as Flaubert's or Maupassant's ... But he never theorized about technique. 3

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1. Notes on Life & Letters (Uniform Edition) "Books", p. 12 (Hereinafter cited as NLL)
2. Conrad's Prefaces to His Work, ed. Edward Garnett (London, 1937), p. 205 (Hereinafter cited as Prefaces)
3. Edward Garnett, Letters from Conrad (1895-1924), Indianapolis 1928, Introduction, pp. 24-25.

Thus, despite the great interest shown in Conrad's fiction, there has as yet appeared comparatively little comment relating the ideas on literary theory and technique.[4] The fact is that Conrad's remarks when brought together and evaluated, go far to provide a basis for his literary intentions and suggest criteria by which to judge his early artistic successes as well as his later generally less successful work.

Background of Conrad's Theory :

Conrad's contribution to the theory of fiction should be understood in the perspective of the late Victorian novelists. By the time Conrad decided to take up literature as a profession, the great age of Dickens, Thackeray and the late Victorians had come to an end. The average novelist seemed to be arriving at an impasse of exhaustion or demoralization. Hardy's abandonment of novel-writing in 1895 was symptomatic of the situation. The old order of free invention had reached its exhaustion in Reade, Bagehot and De Morgan. Conrad entered the field as an amateur but despite the uncertainty of his approach to literary professionalism he sensed the predicament of his art at the outset. Inspite of the fact that George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and

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4. Walter F. Wright's Joseph Conrad on Fiction (1967) and the present writer's Joseph Conrad's Theory of Fiction (1970) are, however, serious attempts to highlight Conrad's Critical Theory in relation to his creative art.

Henry James had paved the way for perceptive fiction criticism and had set high ideals of creative writing. Conrad's sympathies were with his old masters —— Cooper, Marryat and Dickens. He was not quite aware of the tradition of his English predecessors and felt more inclined towards the French masters, particularly Flaubert and Maupassant. Though he denied any conscious influence of Flaubert on his literary writings,[5] his letters to M. Poradowska reveal to what extent he had read and assimilated the French novelist. In his letter of 6 April, 1892, he wrote to his aunt commenting on her own stories :

> In the ... striking simplicity of your descriptions you remind me a little of Flaubert, whose Madame Bovary I have just re-read with respectful admiration ——
>
> .... There you have a man with enough imagination for two realists. There are few authors so creative as he. One never questions for a moment either his characters or his episodes; one would doubt rather one's existence. 6

Maupassants' influence is equally patent. Conrad eulogised the master in one of his essays in 1905 but his correspondence shows greater veneration for the French. Early in his literary career when he was doubtful about his style and method and found his

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5. Life and Letters, II ed. G. Jean-Aubry, p. 206 (Hereinafter cited as LL II)
" ... my Flaubert is the Flaubert of St. Antoine and Education Sentimental and that only from the point of view of the rendering of Concrete things and visual impressions". (Letter to Hugh Walpole)
6. Letters of Joseph Conrad to M. Poradowska (Yale Univ. Press, 1940), p. 44

thoughts "wandering through vast spaces filled with shadowy forms",[7] Maupassant seemed to be a great beacon-light. Writing to his aunt in Brussles, he confessed :

> I am afraid I am too much under the influence of Maupassant. I have studied Pierre et Jean —— thought, method, and everything —— with the deepest discouragement. It seems to be nothing at all, but the mechanics are so complex that they make me tear out my hair. 8

These letters suffice to show the wrong-headedness of those critics of Conrad who claim that he never bothered about theory or principles of aesthetics. The fact is that Conrad's schooling in the French tradition, his fervour for Flaubert's creative imagination and his deep concern with Maupassant's thought, method and everything abundantly prove our view that Conrad began as a self-conscious writer and, to a very great extent, remained loyal to certain theories he held dear. True, there is greater maturity in his later critical writings as in his creative works but it does not prove that he wrote just by 'inspiration'.

When Conrad arrived on the literary scene, the formal discipline sponsored by Flaubert was being challenged by the

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7. Letter of Joseph Conrad to M. Poradowska (Yale Univ. Press, 1940), p. 64 (Letter dated 29 March or 5 April, 1894)

8. Ibid., p. 84 (Letter dated 29 October or 5 Nov.,1894)

experimental license of the young esthetic school but Conrad had a temperamental suspicion of their especialised theories. Art for the sake of art, which flowered during the 'eighties and the 'nineties in the works of Wilde, Moore and Symons, had many roots in the past. Its ultimate origins were in the German romantic philosophers and in Keats and Poe. In fiction, Oscar Wilde and George Moore were the great exponents of the new cult. But Conrad did not share Wilde's plea for the spirit of Beauty to elevate the "cheating merchants".[9] However, he seems to be on the side of George Moore in as much as he proclaimed the freedom of the artist and of art. To Moore, literature already separated from society, became style, separated from substance. Conrad in his own way had recommended a marriage between form and matter, style and substance in his Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus.

If Conrad was sceptical about the literary theories of the aesthetic school, he was still more doubtful about the genuineness of social naturalism. The great problem of this school, according to Conrad, lay in the failure of its exponents to become personally and responsibly implicated in what they were doing. They were too easily satisfied with fragments. They defined their task not in terms of the moral wholeness of

9. W.Y. Tindall, Forces in Modern British Literature (Vintage Books, 1956), p. 6

art but of arguments, practical programmes of social and public action, subjective or documentary techniques. In short, they failed to make an effective union of principle and substance.

Conrad's ultimate adherence to the French masters for guidance shows that though he decided to write in English, he was very much French in his thought and method. But if we go deeper, his early literary and aesthetic intentions seem to be expressions more of a personal than a professional necessity. Conrad's cogitations emanate from the distracted middle years of his life when he was making his harrassed transition from his Polish youth, French exploits and twenty years of maritime service to reluctant and anxious professionalism as an author. His talent was agonized because of his doubts and difficulties but he persistently adhered to his new vocation. Thus he succeeded in making powerful fiction out of desperate obstacles, in dramatising the idee fixe of the obsessed conscience, in analysing the classic moral situations and the pathos of modern skepticism to the last detail.[10] Conrad's theory of the novel has, thus, both a literary and a personal faith, as its background.

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10. M.D. Zabel, Craft and Character (New York, 1957) "Conrad in His Age", p. 212

Fiction as Sensuous Impression :

As pointed out by Conrad's biographers, his transfer from maritime to literary life came about imperceptibly without his desiring it under the pressure of circumstances. But there was something deep-seated within him waiting for an opportunity to well up. The influence of his father's literary activities and his own study of Marryat, Cooper, Dickens and Shakespeare and more especially his love and adoration for Flaubert and Maupassant was decisive in determining the nature of his personal aesthetics.

True, Conrad's entire theory of surface objectivity — the particular image, scene, or extended visual impression suggesting circumstances beyond, is in a direct line from Madame Bovary but in Almayer's Folly his reliance on figurative language and simile operated to give a tone beyond that of surface realism. This is to say that though Conrad felt the impact of Flaubert irresistible, his individuality was at the same time asserting itself. He plays havoc with the French ideal of mot juste and delights in his own purple patches to the embarrassment of the exponents of écriture ideale.

Conrad's letters offer valuable clues to his attitude

as a novelist in the early phase of his career. They range from personal letters addressed to friends and contemporaries to business letters addressed to publishers and reviewers. A survey of Conrad's correspondence between 1894 and 1900 shows the novelist's conscious striving towards literary style and helps us understand his aesthetics in better light. One of the earliest letters addressed to Edward Noble (July 17, 1895) reveals Conrad's concern with the subjective view of art. According to Conrad it is essential for the artist to look into his own being before he aspires to be a chronicler of human life. It requires conscious effort and a deliberate searching of the soul. The process entails insurmountable difficulties :

> It is made up of doubt, or hesitation, of moments silent and anxious when one listens to the thoughts — one's own thoughts — speaking indistinctly deep down somewhere at the bottom of the heart. 11

In another letter to the same person he wrote :

> My dear Noble, do not throw yourself away in fables. Talk about the river — the people — the events, as seen through your temperament. You have remarkable gift of expression, the outcome of an artistic feeling for the world around you, and you must not waste the gift in (if I may say so) illegitimate sensation ... you have much imagination .... Well, that imagination

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11. L., Vol. I, p. 175

> should be used to create human souls, to disclose human hearts — and not to create events that are properly speaking accidents only. To accomplish it you must cultivate your poetic faculty ... you must give yourself up to emotions (no easy task). You must squeeze out of yourself every sensation, every thought, every image — mercilessly, without reserve and without remorse. You must search the darkest corners of your heart, the most remote recesses of your brain, — you must search them for the image, for the glamour, for the right expression. And you must do it sincerely, at any cost .... To me it seems that it is the only way to achieve true distinction. 12

Conrad

Being an imaginative writer himself, could not help thinking in terms of inward resources which are always refreshed by knowledge and developed through the perception of nature without. Conrad, despite his avowal for objectivity, seems to be on the side of the romantic critics who lay considerable emphasis on the artist's temperament and individuality. But unlike the romantics he is not swayed by powerful feelings. He shows an innate distrust of "illegitimate sensation". He would like sensations to be purged of all illegitimacy in the glowing furnace of his soul.

Another aspect of Conrad's theory of the novel is his early preoccupation with technique. As early as 1897, he was

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12. LL, Vol. I, pp. 182-83

fervently recommending the principle of 'oblique vision' to one of his younger confreres, Cunninghame Graham. In his letter of 5th August, 1897, he wrote :

> Straight vision is a bad form: as you know. The proper thing is to look round the corner, because if Truth is not there, there is at any rate a something that distributes shekels. 13

These letters show that even before Conrad came in contact with Henry James or Ford Madox Ford he was quite aware of the fundamental principles of his art and his later friendship with the other novelists only supplemented his basic ideas without altering them drastically.

The essays written before 1900 and collected in Notes on Life and Letters are equally revealing from our point of view. They are a faithful record of Conrad's mind and method, mirroring forth his early views about art and life. The first essay that attracts our attention is entitled "Tales of the Sea" (1898). It is one of the earliest attempts to pay his tributes to Captain Marryat's sea-tales which Conrad had read and assimilated as if they were a classic. Conrad's appreciation of Marryat's novels clearly bears testimony to his own theory of art. "Marryat's novels", he says, "are not the outcome of his

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13. LL, Vol. I, p. 208

art, but of his character, like the deeds that make up his record of naval service. To the artist his work is interesting as a completely successful expression of an unartistic nature".[14] Conrad's sea-tales too reflect the same spirit. Even those tales which have the sea as a background convince us of the indelible stamp of his character. Conrad's interest in the personality of the artist is further illustrated in another essay — "An observer in Malaya" (1898), being a review of Hugh Cliffords' Studies in Brown Humanity. He says :

> And indeed in a book of this kind it is the author's personality which awakens the greatest interest; it shapes itself before one in the ring of sentences, it is seen between the lines — like the progress of a traveller in the jungle. 15

This emphasis on character and personality remained conrad's favourite tenet throughout his literary career.

The essay "Alphonse Daudet" confirms Conrad's earlier disparagement of the "inspiration" theory of art and his emphasis on the travail of the artist and the "disinterestedness of the toiler" on the path of life :

> The road to these distant regions does not lie through the domain of Art or the domain of Science where well-known voices quarrel noisily in a misty

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14. NLL, p. 73

15. Ibid., p. 80

> emptiness; it is a path of toilsome silence upon which travel men simple and unknown, with closed lips, or, may be whispering their pain softly — only to themselves. 16

Obviously, Conrad is here criticising the "Art for Art's sake" movement and the scientific approach of the Naturalist school of Zola. For, according to Conrad, dogmatic adherence to any creed without a glow of personal touch of the artist may not bear fruit in any artistic presentation of life. One has to look within himself and squeeze out 'every sensation, every thought, every image' to prove one's self worthy of the great task.

During the first phase of his literary career, Conrad, though still an apprentice, shows considerable maturity of thought and judgement. He had learnt from the French masters — Hugo, Balzac, Flaubert, Maupassant and Daudet and had also assimilated the works of Marryat, Cooper and other exotic writers. His essays and letters reveal a writer fully conscious of the art of fiction and equally eager to explore fresh avenues in the realm of literature. But as his letters to Madame Poradowska and his literary guide, Edward Garnett, and his publisher, William Blackwood, testify, he was not quite sure of his gifts at that time. The doubts of form — the doubts of

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16. NLL, p. 28

tendency, a mistrust of his own conceptions and scruples of a moral order — assailed him from every side.[17] But the greatest difficulty was that of the medium of expression. The Pole nurtured on French traditions and trying to write in English found himself baffled by the 'exuberance' of the latter language as against the 'preciseness' of the former. His difficulties with the French ideal of *les mot justes* and *ecriture ideale* are well-known. Yet he was tenacious and persistent in his efforts to find a style. His ideal search "for the image, for the glamour, for the right expression" is beautifully suggested in his famous Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*[18] (1897). Conrad begins by critically examining the "justification" for works of art and sets out ideals to which artists should aspire :

> ... art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its lights, in its shadows, in the aspect of matter, and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential — their one illuminating and convincing quality — the very truth of their existence. (p.49)

Conrad thinks that the artist's primary concern should be to

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17. L.L, Vol. I, p. 287 See also letter to David S. Meldrum, dated 10 August, 1898, *Letters of Conrad to Blackwood & Meldrum*, pp. 26-27

18. *Prefaces*, pp. 49-56

depict life in all its aspects but as seen through the temperament. The artist like the scientist and the thinker, seeks the truth and makes his appeal. But whereas the thinker plunges into ideas and the scientist into facts, the artist "descends within himself" to find the terms of his appeal. His appeal is less loud but more profound, less distinct but more stirring. Inshort, it is in "the widest commonality spread" and there is no danger of its being superseded or substituted by the successive generations :

> The changing wisdom of successive generations discards ideas, questions facts, demolishes theories. But the artist appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition — and, therefore, more permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation — and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspiration, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds man to each other, which binds together all humanity — the dead to the living and the living to the unborn. (p. 50)

This is no fad of a romantic. Conrad seems to be soaring up in his visions of the ideal as a philosopher but he is fully conscious of the contents of his message. Translated in fiction

such an art would be an "impression of life" and its appeal would be to "temperament". And such an appeal to be effective must have a sensuous impression :

> All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the sense, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions. It must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music — which is the art of arts. And it is only through complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance ...
>
> My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make your hear, to make you feel — it is, before all, to make you see. That — and no more, and it is every thing. (pp. 51-52)

Conrad's emphasis on the personal elements in art, the impressionistic technique, his plea for all-inclusiveness of the novel and above all his idea of the 'prefect blending of form and substance' are certain principles which he cherished throughout his literary career. Steering clear of the various literary 'isms' of his age, he proceeded to develop an aesthetics which on the one hand is in direct line with the best of French and English traditions and on the other clearly bears his own individual stamp. His collaboration with Ford Madox Ford widened the range of his vision but did not substantially alter his

personal theories of art.

Collaboration with Ford Madox Ford :

Ford Madox Ford, a young enthusiastic writer in the early nineties, was recommended by Henley to Conrad. Although by the year 1897 Conrad had written Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of the Islands, The Nigger of the Narcissus and Tales of Unrest, he felt doubtful about his powers as a novelist and was perplexed about the problems of language and technique. Ford was regarded by the then literary journalists as a "stylist". Conrad saw poetry and genius in Ford and his association gave him some confidence in literary style.

Both Conrad and Ford held the view that the classical English novel had triumphed only by the accident of genius. Its basic form, the series of strange situations linked by flat matters of various sorts, had now led to stalemate. This feeling which found expression in many of Ford's critical tracts is fully revealed in Thus to Revisit (1921) where he found contemporary creative English literature to be the product of "happy-go-lucky and doctrinairly obstinate Amateurs all whose practice is the recording of their own moods of exaltation rather than the rendering of exact observation of life or even

of Manners".[19] Conrad, though not sweeping in his remarks as Ford, was no less unhappy about the neglect of conscious effort in art by the typical English writers. Buoyed by a superstitious notion of divine power which they called inspiration, the typical English novelists as Conrad saw them, felt it their duty to give vent to their emotions without restraint or control. In one of his critical essays "A Glance at Two Books" (1904) Conrad repeated the view which he shared with Ford during the days of collaboration. Far from regarding his work as an achievement of active life, the typical English novelist took the exercise of his art simply as an instinctive, often unreasoned, outpouring of his emotions :

> He does not go about building up his book with a precise intention and a steady mind. It never occurs to him that a book is a deed, that the writing of it is an enterprise as much as the conquest of a colony. He has no such clear conception of his craft. Writing from a full heart, he liberates his soul for the satisfaction of his own sentiment: and when he has finished the scene he is at liberty to strike his forehead and exclaim: "This is genius". 20

Both Ford and Conrad as keen students of the French novel and as devoted followers of Flaubert and Maupassant felt that it was only through the "New Form" that the English novel could be

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19. F.M. Ford, Thus to Revisit (London, 1921), p. 8
20. Joseph Conrad, Last Essays, (1957 ed.), p. 132

rescued from the carelessness of its contemporary votaries. The "New Form" was to be achieved not by following the method of ordinary narration but by "rendering of an Affair".[21] In his monograph, Joseph Conrad (1924), Ford recalled :

> For it became very early evident to us that what was the matter with the novel, and the British novel in particular, was that it went straight forward, whereas in your general making acquaintanceship with your fellows you never do go straightforward .... To get such a man in fiction you could not begin at his beginning and work his life chronologically to the end. You must first get him in with a strong impression, and then work backward and forward over his past .... That theory at least we gradually evolved. 22

Ford and Conrad in their numerous sessions together, worked out their idea of the "planned novel" in which each step in the novel points towards a predetermined effect and leaves nothing to chance. They used to say that a subject "must be seized by the throat until the last drop of dramatic possibility was squeezed out of it".[23] Every word and every action, they maintained must carry the story forward —— what they called novelistic progression d'effet ——wherein the intensity increases as the story develops. This attempt to convey increasing urgency and intensity in the story would involve,

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21. F.M. Ford, Thus to Revisit, p. 44
22. F.M. Ford, Joseph Conrad, pp. 129-30
23. F.M. Ford, Thus to Revisit, p. 44

said the authors, an assiduous study, a slow and calculating work and strict control of the material.

The method of "time-shift" was adopted by the collaborators to suggest dramatically the substance of the work to come. Conrad had already spoken of the value of "rescued moments" from a "passing phase of life" in his preface to The Nigger.[24] Ford with his study of the impressionistic technique of the Pre-Raphaelites highlighted the effectiveness of the method. This method of poetic break-up applies not only to the narrative structure but also to the presentation of character.

What was achieved with narrative structure and character development, the authors realised, could also be effectively accomplished with speech. Conrad and Ford, perhaps influenced by Flaubert's experiments with interrupted speech, decided that to avoid boredom long speeches must be broken down, interspersed with narrative and bolstered by little "jumps" in the pace of the novel. These "jumps would provide, they said, a "constant succession of tiny, unobservable surprises" which would alleviate the monotony of incessant speech.

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24. Prefaces, p. 52

The object of all these efforts at control, as far as Conrad was concerned, was to lend an air of inevitability to his scenes and characters; so that what does happen must seem to be the only thing that could possibly have happened. Conrad, with his close attention to character development, always had in mind the intricate interactions of the minor personalities as complements to his major figures. This theory of interaction maintains that everything that has gone before has some importance in the making and subsequent development of situation. Conrad, therefore, had to be especially careful to "prepare" the facts surrounding every new character and every change of pace; for in this sensitive arrangement of personalities, narrative and speech, everything is of importance and nothing can be neglected.

Ford and Conrad, in their attempt to expound a new theory of fiction were, of course, influenced by the techniques of the French masters — objectivity, dramatization of situations exact word, inevitable ending etc., but they had also learnt some lessons from the English novelists. The impact of the Pre-Raphaelite and the symbolist school and the pervading influence of Henry James broadened the outlook of the critics of fiction in England. Though Freud was not yet extensively exploited for the delineation of the inner life of characters, both Ford and

Conrad learned from William James's psychology (through Henry James) the advantages of presenting life at various levels of consciousness simultaneously.

Though the true test of their theories did not appear in the collaboration yet it would be difficult to undermine the experience of their cogitations in their individual works. Ford applied these theories in his The Good Soldier and the Tietjens Saga; Conrad, perhaps, had them in mind while writing Nostromo and other successive works. The immediate result of the collaboration meant great inspiration for Conrad. It was with Romance that he was stirred with his memories of the South-American Republic, its revolutions and counter-revolutions. From the colour and shifting light of Romance to the picturesqueness of Gulfo Placido in Nostromo, from the romantic adventures of the former to the idealistic vision of the latter is Conrad's progress from the collaboration to his individual achievement.

Fiction as Embodiment of "Ideal Value" :

By the year 1900 Conrad had given up the sailor's profession for good and had taken up literature as a regular vocation. The years 1901 and 1902 were spent in seclusion at

Pent Farm where he had moved in October 1898. The farm had associations of the Pre-Raphaelites and was conveniently used by Conrad and Ford as venue for their meetings. It was here that Conrad wrote one story after another "Typhoon", "Falk", "The End of Tether" and collaborated with Ford for The Inheritors and Romance. His next novel, Nostromo which came to be regarded as his masterpiece, was also written in the serene atmosphere of the rural background.

Although the years following the completion of Nostromo hardly show any fundamental change in Conrad's aesthetics, there are some definite indications in his development as a novelist. During this period Conrad reveals his self-consciousness as an artist more acutely and aspires to break new ground in the realm of fiction. Flaubert, Henry James and Ford Madox Ford had, no doubt, instilled in him the idea of the objective novel, but he was also trying to make the best of his personal aesthetics and the theories of his immediate predecessors. The ironic treatment of curious rendering of the story in Under Western Eyes and the involved chronology of Chance indicate Conrad's preoccupations with new methods to achieve objectivity in art.

It was, perhaps, his comparative feeling of confidence in his powers that led Conrad to make experiments with new subject-matter. By now he was far from his sea-life and disliked brooding over mere sea-stuff. He was no more seeking complete isolation from 'Land Entanglements'. As he wrote to Sir Sidney Colvin, all his concern was with "the ideal value of things, events and people".[25] Almost all that he wrote between 1903 and 1904 bears testimony to this new critical awareness. The theme of stories like "An Anarchist" and "The Informer" fall in line with that of A Secret Agent, studies in anarchist and subversive life; "Il Conde" and "The Secret Sharer" are excellent psychological studies. "A Smile of Fortune" and "Freya of the Seven Isles", though reminiscent of Conrad's early sea-tales have undergone a 'sea-change' in their treatment, suggestion and appeal. Chance reveals the humbugging of a financier and Under Western Eyes presents an important aspect of Czarist repression and the Russian mind. Victory is very much Conradian both in form and matter.

Conrad's letters, his critical essays on Anatole France, Maupassant and Henry James and his autobiographical works The Mirror of the Sea and A Personal Record are the

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25. LL, Vol. II, p. 185

chief sources of Conrad's theory of fiction during the maturer period of his literary career. Our study of these sources not only supplements our view of Conrad's early theories of art but also sheds fresh light on his later thinking on life and art.

Conrad's letters to his friends and contemporaries are full of suggestions about his theory of the novel. They reveal his passion for art as self-conscious effort, his exhortation for the truth of life in art and his plea for philosophical sanity. He demands sincerity of approach from the novelist and asks him to abide by the idea of 'fidelity' and 'humanity'. He condemns Art for Art's sake and rejects the Realist's doctrine of sociological reportage. Some of the letters that Conrad wrote to his friends and younger contemporaries are particularly revealing. In one of his letters to John Galsworthy he is pleading his old theory of inwardness or subjective treatment of life :

> One must explore deep and believe the incredible to find the few particles of truth floating in an ocean of insignificance. And before all one must divest oneself of every particle of one's character ... 26

Conrad's unflinching faith in the writer's personality is a characteristic which dominated his entire literary career

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26. LL, Vol. I, pp. 301-302
See also LL, Vol. II, p. 68 (Letter to Norman Douglas)

and remained one of his most cherished creeds. For, to him, art is nothing but "life seen through temperament". But the artist himself should keep away from his creations. His must be an unseen presence behind his figure. Besides, his detachment and disinterestedness should ultimately reach the Keatsian 'Negative Capability". He makes his point still more clear when he says :

> In a book you should love the idea and be scrupulously faithful to your conception of life. There lies the honour of the writer, not in the fidelity to his personages. You must never allow them to decoy you out of yourself. As against your people you must preserve an attitude of perfect indifference ... Your attitude to them should be purely intellectual, more independent, freer, less rigorous than it is. 27

Conrad realized the importance of the objective method of writing fiction progressively as he advanced in practice. He tried several devices like the creation of Marlow in "Youth", "Heart of Darkness", Lord Jim and Chance and the teacher of languages in Under Western Eyes to achieve objectivity but his personality can easily be discovered behind the new-fangled screens. For all his loyalty to his creed, Flaubert, after finishing Madame Bovary, cried in agony: "Madame Bovary, C'est moi"; Conrad could achieve nothing better but the

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27. LL, Vol. I, pp. 301-2

illusions in his case are often remarkable.

As a self-conscious artist Conrad never failed to point out the travail of an artist in the process of creation. Whether for self-expression or for communication, his work meant great inner tussle with his entire being. His earlier letters to M. Poradowska and Edward Garnett bear testimony to his struggle for a style. Later he aspires to be not only a stylist but also a 'seer' :

> ...for we are craftsman as well as seers, labouring in the flesh as well as in the spirit. 28

The 'seer', according to Conrad's definition, has to be a humanist if he has to justify his place in the commonwealth of literature. No wonder, Conrad reacted sharply to Arthur Symon's criticism of his works as full of "scenes of cruelty" and the novelist "obsessed by visions of spilt blood". Conrad wrote fervently :

> One thing that I am certain of is that I have approached the object of my task, things human, in a spirit of piety. The earth is a temple where there is going on a mystery play, childish and poignant, ridiculous and awful enough, in all conscience. Once in, I've tried to behave decently. I have not degraded any quasi-religious

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28. LL, Vol. II, p. 79

> sentiment by tears and groans and if I have been amused or indignant, I've neither grinned nor gnashed my teeth. In other words, I've tried to write with dignity, not out of regard for myself, but for the sake of the spectacle, the play with an obscure beginning and an unfathomable denouement. 29

This basic humanistic note which Conrad insisted upon formed the back-bone of his art, but it was lacking in Realists. From this point of view, his correspondence with H.G. Wells and Arnold Bennett is equally rewarding. In one of his letters to H.G Wells, Conrad clearly defined his fundamental differences with him :

> ... at bottom, you are an uncompromising realist. There is a cold jocular ferocity about the handling of that mankind in which you believe that gives me the shudders sometimes. 30

Conrad, inspite of his basic humanism, was sceptical of mankind in general. Wells who regarded himself as the champion of humanity, started with the assumption of inherent goodness in mankind but Conrad who had a wider range of experience and deeper insight into human psychology could not be so optimistic.

Conrad's letters to Arnold Bennett are still more

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29. LL. Vol. II, pp. 83-84
30. Ibid.I ,pp. 310-11
In another letter Conrad had written to H.G. Wells: "Generally the fault that I find with you is that you do not take sufficient account of human imbecility which is cunning and perfidious. (LL, Vol. I, p. 329)

significant. His letter dated 10th March 1902, shows his geniality of temper in the appreciation of his contemporary's work and at the same time reflects his own theories of art :

> The reading of The Man from the North has inspired me with the greatest respect for your artistic conscience. I am profoundly impressed with the achievement of style. To read it was to me quite a new experience of the language; and the delight was great enough to make me completely disregard the subject... I would quarrel not with the truth of your conception but with the realism there of. You are faithful to your dogmas of realism. How realism in art will never approach reality. And your art, your gift, should be put to the service of a larger and freer faith. 31

Truely speaking, Conrad never approved of strict adherence to any school or movement. Instead, he pleaded for the "ideal value" in art.[32] Realists, according to Conrad, at their best, could be historians, reporters and two-dimensional artists: they could never be poets, prophets and men of vision.

Conrad's concern for the ideal value of art, his plea to penetrate the deeper truths of life and his preoccupation with technical devices to view life from various vantage-points

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31. LL, Vol. I, pp. 302-3 (Italics mine)
32. In his letter to Sir Sidney Colvin, Conrad wrote:
Perhaps you won't find it presumption if, after 22 years of work, I may say that I have not been very well understood. I have been called a writer of the sea, of the Tropics, a descriptive writer, a romantic writer —— and a realist. But as a matter of fact all my concern has been with the "ideal" value of things, events and people. The humorous, the pathetic, the passionate, the sentimental aspects came in of themselves. (LL, Vol. II, p. 185)

are best illustrated in some of his critical essays written early in the first decade of the present century. The essay "Anatole France" (1904) is significant in revealing to us the Frenchman's influence on Conrad. Anatole France, according to Conrad, is worthy of a great tradition and imbibes in his person the lessons of the past and the concern for the present. He is no less earnest about the future. In the commonwealth of letters he is a true Republican. But his artistry is a fine fabric of his philosophic attitude :

> He is indulgent to the weakness of the people, and perceives that political institutions, whether continued by the wisdom of the few or the ignorance of the many, are incapable of seeing the happiness of many. He perceived this truth in the serenity of his soul and in the elevation of his mind. He expresses his convictions with the measure, restraint and harmony, which are indeed princely qualities. He is a great analyst of illusions. 33

Readers of Conrad's early works like Almayer's Folly and "Heart of Darkness" and his later political novels like The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes cannot fail to discern Conrad's temperamental and artistic affinities with that type of analysis which is directed towards universal human motives, actions and aspirations. France's qualities are very much the characteristics of Conrad himself who, at his best, is one of

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33. NLL, "Anatole France", p. 44

the greatest analysts of human illusion.

Anatole France has a typically stoic attitude towards life and probes the innermost recesses of mankind wherein lies his humanity and his profound compassion. "To be hopeful in an artistic sense", says Conrad in his essay on "Books", "it is not necessary to think that the world is good".[34] France held this view throughout his literary career :

> He knows that our best hopes are irrealisable; that it is the most incredible misfortune of mankind, but also its highest privilege, to aspire towards the impossible —. He knows this well because he is an artist and a master; but he knows, too, that only in the continuity of effort there is refuge from despair for minds less clear-seeing and philosophic than his own. Therefore he wishes to believe and to hope, preserving in an activity the consoling illusion of power and intelligent purpose. 35

The paragraph quoted above not only suggests France's philosophic nature but also reflects Conrad's own attitude to life. "Hopeful illusion" is the forte of both these writers of fiction.

The essay "Guy de Maupassant" (1904) supplements that on Anatole France. Here Conrad tries to clarify the issue whether the art of the novelist is primarily moralistic or

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34. NLL, "Books", p. 11 35. NLL, "Anatole France", p. 45

hedonistic. Referring to the works of Maupassant, he claims that true art combines both the strains and further suggests that more harmonious the fusion of dulce and utile, the greater the artist is to emerge. He says :

> The interest of a reader in a work of imagination is either ethical or that of simple curiosity. Both are perfectly legitimate, since there is both a moral and an excitement to be found in a faithful rendering of life. And in Maupassant's work there is the interest of curiosity and the moral of a point of view consistently preserved and never obtruded for the end of personal gratification. 36

Conrad's analysis of Maupassant's art is suggestive in as much as it also implies Conrad's view about his own creative works. About the moral element in Maupassant, Conrad is less censorious than Henry James who felt the Frenchman's novels rather fleshy.

The last of this series of critical writings is Conrad's essay "Henry James" which appeared in North American Review in 1905. Earlier in 1899, he had given ample proof of the master's genius in his letter to John Galsworthy wherein he had fervently admired James's cosmopolitan culture, polished humanism and artistic perfection without losing sight of his

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36. NLL, "Guy de Maupassant", pp. 34-35

limitations as a novelist.[37] The essay on Henry James written some years later suggests James's influence on Conrad who had by that time established himself as one of the acknowledged masters in English fiction. Moreover, there are several pregnant remarks interspersed in the essay which help us evaluate Conrad's theory of the novel in general. Comparing James's work to a majestic river, he says :

> All creative art is magic, is evocation of the unseen in forms persuasive, enlightening, familiar and surprising, for the edification of mankind, pinned down by the conditions of its existence to the earnest consideration of the most insignificant tides of reality.
>
> Action in its essence, the creative art of a writer of fiction may be compared to rescue work carried out in darkness against cross-gusts of wind swaying the action of a great multitude. It is rescue work, this snatching of vanishing phases of turbulence, disguised in fair words, out of the native obscurity into a light where the struggling forms may be seen, seized upon, endowed with the only possible form of permanence in this world of relative values — the permanence of memory. 38

The passage quoted above suggesting the magical powers of art as well as its moral note for the "edification of mankind" and the reference to "snatching of vanishing phases of turbulence" are direct echoes from the Preface to The Nigger. Applying his favourite canons of impressionism on James's novels,

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37. LL, Vol. I, pp. 270-71

38. NLL, "Henry James", pp. 15-16

Conrad' finds him a great artist who is preoccupied with dramatizing the impressions of life in persuasive and enlightening style. His discrimination and his penetration are entirely his own and in this particular field nobody can match him.

Conrad pays glowing tributes to Henry James in one of his most remarkable passages of the essay where he distinguishes between the art of the historian and that of the novelist :

> Fiction is history, human history or it is nothing. But it is also more than that: it stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of form and the observation of social phenomenon, whereas history is based on documents, and the reading of print and handwriting- on second-hand impression. Thus fiction is nearer truth ... a novelist is a historian, the preserver, the keeper, the expounder of human experience. As is meet for a man of his descent and tradition Mr. Henry James is the historian of fine consciences. 39

Conrad recognises in James a historian not of the mere procession of kings and generals or men and manners. He is an historian of a distinct species. As an artist he is not interested in the temporal and the transitory. Instead he probes the inner recesses of mankind and faithfully records the nuances of their fine feelings.

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39. NLL, "Henry James", pp. 20-21

Conrad's letters and his critical essays assume great importance in our attempt to judge his personal aesthetics and in the formulation of his theories of art. No less significant are two of his semi-autobiographical works, The Mirror of the Sea and A Personal Record which reveal from a personal angle the individuality that can only be discovered, objectively in the process of creation. The Mirror of the Sea (1906) more than "the lyric illusion of an old romantic heart" is a prose poem about the sea and sea-life. But it is a poem founded not alone on flights of imagination but on profound realism and knowledge of detail. Its basis of personal reminiscence expands in the rare qualities of poetry and romance. From our point of view, however, The Mirror has only some marginal value. It helps us to trace the comparative ease in style over which Conrad had been struggling for the last ten or fifteen years. A Personal Record (1908), on the other hand, is not only evocation of childhood but also a "sort of literary confession". He had decided to give it the title of The Art and the Life or The Pages and the Years.[40]

The autobiographical note in Conrad's works has recently received great attention from his critics. Ever since Gustaf Morf pleaded that Conrad's pre-occupation with the theme

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40. LL, Vol. II, p. 88

of betrayal and his sympathy with the outcasts of society is the projection of his own life in terms of art, the view has been exploited by other critics for expounding similar themes on different aspects of Conrad's life. Conrad might not have agreed with the view that most of his characters are carved in his own image but he did not apparently deny the basic theory of personal involvement. In A Personal Record he confessed that "a novelist lives in his work":

> He stands there, the only reality in an invented world, among imaginary things, happenings and people. Writing about them, he is only writing about himself. But the disclosure is not complete. He remains, to a certain extent, a figur behind the Veil: a suspected rather than a seen presence —— a movement and a voice behind the draperies of fiction. 41

This passage abundantly explains Conrad's own position. Having matured in the surroundings and under the special conditions of sea-life, he developed a special piety towards that part of his past, for its impressions were vivid, its appeal direct, its demand such as could be responded to with the natural elation of youth and strength equal to the call.

Conrad believes that an imaginative artist is more dependent on his own memories and impressions than on the

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41. Prefaces, p. 20

current ideas and social environment. If he wants to see life and see it steadily, he has to penetrate below the surface. The explorer of human hearts and the "historian of fine consciences" cannot be an utopian or a social reformer. He is more philosophical and serene. Having seen through 'the life of things' he would find it difficult to be wholly joyous or wholly sad :

> The Comic, when it is human, soon takes upon itself a face of pains and some of our griefs have their source in weakness which must be recognized with smiling compassion as the common inheritance of us all. Joy and sorrow in this world pass into each other, mingling their forms and their murmurs in the twilight of life as mysterious as an over-shadowed ocean, while the dazzling brightness of supreme hopes lies far-off, fascinating and still, on the distant edge of the horizon. 42

It is because of this philosophical attitude to life and art that Conrad resents being labelled as a realist, a romantic, a symbolist or even an impressionist. He does not agree with the traditional view of the world. Instead he asserts :

> I would fondly believe that its object is purely spectacular: a spectacle for awe, love, adoration or hate, if you like, but ... never for despair. 43

The 'spectacle' rather than 'thesis' or 'dogma' delighted Conrad more than anything else.

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42. Prefaces, pp. 204-5 43. A Personal Record, p. 92

In the concluding paragraph of "A Familiar Preface" Conrad lays down his famous dictum which since 1912 has been quoted, elaborated, criticised and even rejected by scholars and commentators, and yet remains the truest key to his art. He says :

> Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas: so simply that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, among others, on the idea of Fidelity. 44

To Conrad "Fidelity" stands above all human virtues and from it all other human virtues spring. Inspite of Douglas Hewitt's criticism of the Fidelity theory, we find that it remains the guiding thread through all the principal works of Conrad. This is presented in a simple and elemental way in his earlier work and becomes gradually complex in his later novels as in Nostromo, Victory and Rescue.

Conrad regarded imaginative writing to be far more important than mere historical recording of facts and data. It is to the creative writings of imaginative writers that he refers in his essay on "Books" (1905) when he says that "they are nearest to us, for they contain our very thought, our ambitions,

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44. Prefaces, p. 208

our indignations, our illusions, our fidelity to truth, and our persistent leaning towards error".[45] And of all such books, novels which "the Muses should love" make a serious claim on his compassion. Conrad conceived of the novel as history, psychology, poetry and other fine arts cast into one structure and informed by the power of imagination. This emphasis on 'inclusiveness' meant that the novel had to become the receptacle of a large vision of human experience. Ford Madox Ford wrote that he and Conrad had agreed that "the novel is absolutely the only vehicle for the thought of our day. With the novel you can do anything; you can enquire into every department of life, you can explore every department of the world of thought".[46] It is because of this lofty conception of the novel that Conrad strenuously aspires to achieve "to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music"[47] in his creative writings as he discusses the subject in the Preface to The Nigger. Later in his essay "Henry James", he refers to all creative art being magic, an "evocation of the unseen in forms persuasive, enlightening, familiar and surprising".[48] Like Henry James Conrad considers the novel to be a record of human impressions.

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45. NLL, "Books", pp. 5-7
46. F.M. Ford, Joseph Conrad, p. 222
47. Prefaces, p. 51
48. NLL, "Henry James", p. 15

Henry James thinks of the novel as a "direct impression of life"[49] and Conrad, emulating the master, asserts: "Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing".[50] The novelist is one who is "the chronicler of the adventures of mankind amongst the dangers of the kingdom of the earth".[51]

The art of novel writing is comprehensive in "content" and symbolic and impressionistic in "technique". In his letter to B.H. Clark, Conrad made this point quite clear :

> The symbolic conception of a work of art has this advantage that it makes a triple appeal covering the whole field of life. All the great creations of literature have been symbolic, and in that way have gained in complexity, in power, in depth and in beauty. 52

It is from this conception of the novel that Conrad's moral and philosophical ideas are closely integrated. Early in 1895, he had written in the Preface to Almayers' Folly that "there is a bond between us and that humanity so far away".[53] In A Personal Record he emphasised the point :

> .... And what is a novel if not a conviction of our fellowmens' existence strong enough to take

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49. The House of Fiction ed. Leon Edel, p. 29
50. NLL, "Henry James", p. 20
51. NLL, "Books", p. 8
52. LL, Vol. II, p. 204
53. Prefaces, pp. 37-38

> upon itself a form of imagined life clearer than reality and whose accumulated verisimilitude of selected episodes puts to shame the pride of documentary history. 54

Like all great imaginative writers Conrad professes to make his work abound with images which find a mirror in every mind and with sentiments to which every bosom returns and echoes. Knowing full well that life is neither all smiles, nor all tears, he suggests:

> The pursuit of happiness by means lawful and unlawful, through resignation or revolt, by the clever manipulation of conventions or by solemn hanging on to the skirts of the latest scientific theory, is the only theme that can be legitimately developed by the novelist ... 55

Conrad is trying to make it quite clear that given the freedom of imagination, the creative artist can weave a texture by the manipulation of conventions and the scientific theory. He thinks that the liberty of imagination should be the most precious possession of the novelist. Intellectual cowardice is not justifiable on any grounds. He praises Stendhal's novels because they are written in a spirit of "fearless liberty". By this liberty, however, Conrad does not mean 'moral nihilism'.

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54. A Personal Record (Uniform Ed.), p. 15

55. NLL, "Books", pp. 7-8

He would require from the novelists many acts of faith of which the first would be "the cherishing of an undying hope" which implies all the "piety of effort and renunciation" :

> to be hopeful in an artistic sense it is not necessary to think that the world is good. It is enough to believe that there is no impossibility of its being made so .... I would ask that in his dealings with mankind he should be capable of giving a tender recognition to their obscure virtues. I would not have him impatient with their small failings and scornful of their errors .... I would wish him to take a large forgiveness at men's ideas and prejudices which are by no means the outcome of malevolence, but dependent on their education, their social status, even their professions.... It is in the impartial practice of life, if anywhere, that the promise of perfection for his art can be found, rather than in the absurd formulas trying to prescribe this or that particular method of technique or conception. 56

These lines speak for themselves and they abundantly sum up Conrad's philosophical ideas about the novel.

With his idealistic view of art, Conrad had no sympathy for dry intellectuality and abstract theorising. In his letters and critical notes, he made no secret of his dislike for mere 'invention'. His chief forte is the power of imagination. Without being quite philosophical like Wordsworth or Coleridge, he set great store by the artist's power to create. He might

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56. NLL, "Books", pp. 11-12

have fully agreed with the latter in the power of imagination "to dissolve, diffuse, and dissipate, in order to recreate" (Biographia Literaria, Ch. XIII). Conrad's rejection of mere theorists arose from his knowledge of their lack of creative imagination. Believing as he does in the efficacy of this divine power, he says :

> Let him (the novelist) nature the strength of his imagination amongst the things of this earth, which it is his business to cherish and know, and refrain from calling down his inspiration ready-made from some heaven of perfections of which he knows nothing. 57

Conrad as a romantic believes in the miracles of imagination although he also recommends restraint in wielding this power. His method in some of his tales, though not exactly echoing Wordsworth's theory of "emotions recollected in tranquillity", partakes of this belief in personal experience glamourised through imagination. In A Personal Record he maintains :

> One's literary life must turn frequently for sustenance to memories and seek discourse with the shades. 58

But Conrad's "shades" are not mystical or transcendental. They are men and women of this earth who have had their past, their

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57. NLL, "Books", p. 12

58. Prefaces, p. 203

history. Conrad's emphasis on the 'earthiness' of his characters is a rich contribution to the modern concept of fiction. His theory, though never meant for mandatory adherence, nevertheless offers insight into the art of the novel. He considers the novel to be the fittest medium for painting his impressions, and recording his dreams and visions. Just because it has neither the limitations of poetry nor that of drama, the novel can provide the largest canvas for depicting human life.

Towards New Techniques :

Conrad's sceptical reactions to theories and principles of aesthetics have often led critics to suggest that he was more of an inspired than a self-conscious artist. To them the two faculties seem incompatible. That Conrad enjoyed a better degree of imagination and had also a supreme gift of creation, nobody can deny. But it is equally true that his struggle with his material for form, style, suggestion and evocation bear ample testimony to his adherence to the Flauberatian creed. As pointed out earlier, Conrad had read and assimilated Flaubert and Maupassant thoroughly when he started writing in English. This partly explains why Conrad's early remarks about technique and craftsmanship echo the French

master's literary ideals. His advice to Edward Noble early in 1895 "to squeeze out of yourself every sensation, every thought, every image"[59] shows to what extent Conrad felt obliged to pursue his craft with a single-minded devotion. Another letter to his publisher William Blackwood is a clear confession of Conrad's efforts to bring aesthetic considerations in writing his novels. Writing to Blackwood on 28th August, 1897, he was reporting to him about the progress on Reggie :

> The truth is that I am very much preoccupied with the story. It'll be — apart from its subject — a deliberate attempt to get in some artistic effects of a graphic order ... 60

And in his "Familiar Preface" to A Personal Record, he made it amply clear that the primary concern of imaginative writers should be with the How and not so much with the Why :

> And in this matter of life and art it is not the Why that matters so much to our happiness as the How. As the Frenchman said: "Il y a toujours la maniere". Very true. Yes. There is the manner. The manner in laughter, in tears, in irony, in indignations and enthusiasms, in judgements — and even in love. The manner in which, as in the features and characters of a human face, the inner truth is foreshadowed for those who know how to look at their kind. 61

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59. LL, Vol. I, pp. 182-83

60. Letters to Blackwood and D.S. Meldrum, p. 6

61. Prefaces, p. 207

Conrad's letter, notes and references in the novels abundantly suggest his preoccupations with technique and craftsmanship. From the first to the last he had an intense feeling for form and construction. He considers technique to be the sine qua non of artistic distinction.

It is perhaps paradoxical that noval which exists as a protean and amorphous form should have received such attentive formal treatment. Nevertheless, recognising that a concern with prose fiction meant a concern with form, Conrad proceeded to attack the problem of structure with a bias that extended poetic techniques to certain aspects of the novel. When Conrad, like Flaubert before him, stated the action of the plot in terms of situation and scene and not from the point of view of the author, he was, of course, bringing to bear a poetic device upon the novel. Similarly, when Conrad like James strove for the creation of pictures — especially those tableaux settings that we find in his early Malayan works — he was using, so to speak, plastic images to "narrate" story and suggest themes. This mixture of the different arts, was, as Frederick Karl points out, surely part of Conrad's effort to give form to so formless a medium as the novel.[62]

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62. "Joseph Conrad's Literary Theory" in Criticism II, 1960

In this connection one of Conrad's letters to M. Poradowska is instructive. In this particular letter to his aunt, Conrad, while confiding to her his difficulties in writing English, especially underscored his trouble in trying to put what he called "the ideas of the novel" into definite form. He wrote: "I prefer to dream a novel rather than to write it. For the dream of the work is always much more beautiful than the reality of the printed thing".[63] Conrad came to realize that a clear-cut and well-defined form for the novel was impossible to attain and that his frequent use, for example, of the chinese-box-like narration was an indication of his arbitrary procedures. No single procedure could be satisfactory. In "the dream of the novel", Conrad implied, the form is protean, and in contrast with reality, the dream has an attractive shiftiness. Form, he recognised, can be only the semblance of experience, but in artistic hands the semblance is often of greater intensity than the real. He particularly emphasized the plasticity of his characters and scenic arrangements which he felt were essential to his literary technique.[64]

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63. Letters to M. Poradowska (1940), p. 109
It is significant to note that Marlow ends his story in The Heart of Darkness with a specific reference to dream-analogy: "It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dream (Heart of Darkness, p. 80)

64. LL, Vol. II, p. 317

Commensurate with Conrad's attempt to suggest psychological depth through a surface of multiple images, was his desire for precision, a move away from abstractions and unwanted connotations, towards what we may call a realism of the word. Part of Conrad's endless dissatisfaction with the English language stemmed from its manifold connotations. He admired French for its clear edges and limpidity. Conrad desired surface clarity; he didnot want his extensions of meaning to stem from verbal confusion but rather to be projections from his sense of scene and human psychology. Too often, he complained, the English word, full of potential ambiguity as it was, would cloud and not extend his meaning. Verbal clarity was essential for exactitude, and surely his inability to write rapidly derived from his need to convey the precise meaning and the precise connotation he wanted. That almost exclusive feeling for the exact word and exact image was part and parcel of his attempt to view his material objectively, however difficult that might be when the subject-matter was deeply felt.

In his nervous concern with choosing the "exact word", Conrad was reflecting his background of French reading. In his essay on Maupassant, he commended the French writer's sense of

exactness, remarking that actualities rendered are the stuff of the novelist who deals with the concrete in order to glean realities from a "universe of vain appearances". Conrad further praised Maupassant's diligence in polishing his work to obtain "the vision of its true shape and detail", for seeking its escape, which can be only one true form from an infinity of possibilities; Maupassant's aim, like Conrad's, was that the subject be adequately seen.

Everything Conrad says about Maupassant also applies to Flaubert whom he had read and re-read with respectful admiration by 1892. It was, however, neither Flaubert the realist nor Flaubert the symbolist who attracted the attention of young Conrad, but the Flaubert who in "his unworldly, almost ascetic devotion to his art" was "a sort of literary saint-like hermit".[65] In Flaubert's combination of surface detail and constant suggestion through concrete images, Conrad found the Hellenic balance which he recognised as the imaginative faculty, that balance perfectly maintained by Turgenev, Maupassant as well as Flaubert.

Conrad's non-fictional writings reflect a spirit almost identical with Flaubert's. In both writers, the awareness of

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65. A Personal Record, p. 3

style and its possible stagnation became part of their creative processes and helped to mould their aesthetics. In one of his letters to Edward Garnett, Conrad lamented that while other writers can lean *on* dialect or tradition or even the fad of the hour, he had only his personal uncertainties, his "impressions and sensations" to draw upon.[66] In Flaubert, the development of a style likewise signified the relinquishment of props, personal and social, and the artist, isolated and "wrapped in (his) bear-skin", while exploiting personal doubts, must "stand to his work as God to his creation, invisible and all powerful; he must be every-where felt but nowhere seen". Both Conrad and Flaubert stressed the impersonality of the creator as a way of preserving the uncertainty, the "half-knowledge" necessary to all points of view. Flaubert wrote to George Sand that "High Art is scientific and impersonal" and that by an effort of the imagination, one must transfer oneself into one's characters.[67] Similarly, Conrad advised Galsworthy to be more sceptical, more impersonal, and to preserve an attitude of perfect indifference towards his characters.[68] Conrad's writing was based on the variability of human nature and human action. A work of art, he said in a letter to Barrett Clark,

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66. Letters from Joseph Conrad (Indianapolis, 1928), p. 59
67. Selected Letters of G.Flaubert, ed.R.Rumbold (London,1950),p. 98
68. LL, Vol. I, pp. 301-2

"is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion".[69]

As pointed out earlier, Conrad supplemented his knowledge of the theoretic aspects of his art by collaborating with Ford Madox Ford and consciously or unconsciously adopted certain tenets of the Jamesian aesthetics. Ford and Conrad, in view of the technical poverty of the English novel had thought of rescuing it from further degeneration by evolving new forms of fiction. The "New Form" was to be achieved, as stated above, by rendering of an affair and not by mere narration of facts and cataloguing of details. Ford soon moved in a direction apparently different from that of Conrad but basically they were both trying to be objective in the treatment of their material. Conrad on his part learnt from experience and also from his associations with James the artistic value of dramatisation, the juxtaposition of scenes and the rendering of impressions by various media of consciousness. Again, the method of broken chronology, so dear to Conrad from the days of his earliest literary adventures, remained one of his favourite canons of craftsmanship in fiction. "Straight vision is a bad form", he had advised Edward Noble and in his own practice as a novelist he tried to catch the impressions of life invariably by looking "round the corner"[70]

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69. LL, Vol. I, p. 205 70. LL, Vol. I, p. 208

Conrad, like Flaubert and Henry James, attained objectivity, imaginatively and not discursively, precisely without being journalistic. When he wrote to Hugh Clifford that no single word or method is adequate — that the "imagination of the reader should be left free to arouse his feeling"[71] — he was, of course, suggesting that really big themes came through the novelist's awareness of all the potentialities of his subject-matter. Late in his life Conrad for once laid bare his heart to B.M. Clark. In his letter of May 4, 1918, he wrote :

> My writing life extends but only over twenty-three years, and I need not point out to an intelligence as alert as yours that all that time has been a a time of evolution, in which some critics have detected three marked periods — and that the process is still going on. Some critics have found fault with me for not being constantly myself. But they are wrong. I am always myself. I am a man of formed character. Certain conclusions remain immovably fixed in my mind, but I am no slave to prejudices and formulas, and I shall never be. My attitude to subjects and expressions, the angles of vision, my methods of composition will, within limits be always changing — not because I am unstable or unprincipled but because I am free. Or perhaps it may be more exact to say, because I am always trying for freedom within my limits. 72

This passage clearly points out Conrad's belief in :

a) The 'evolution' in a writer of imaginative literature;

b) The 'freedom' of the artist; and

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71. LL, Vol. II, pp. 279-80

72. Ibid., p. 204

c) The 'flexibility' of the method in accordance with the subject matter.

Conrad's own literary career extending over a quarter of a century shows his evolution from an exotic writer to a romantic realist and an impressionist. His style also developed from the rhetorical and picturesque pages of the earlier works to the sterner style of the middle phase and the serenity of the last phase.

Conrad's preoccupation with technique and theoretical aspects of his art should not mean that he was pursuing method for the sake of method. In his theory as well as in practice, technique remains a means to an end and not an end by itself. For all his admiration for Henry James, he had written to Edward Garnett about the plight of the common reader when grappling with such a work as The Spoils of Poynton which is a feat of craftsmanship.[73] His letter to Galsworthy, dated 11th February, 1899, fully brings out his awareness of James's limitations :

> Technical perfection, unless there is some glow to illumine and warm it from within, must necessarily be cold. I agree that in H.J. there is such glow and not a dim one either, but to us used, absolutely accustomed to unartistic expression of

73. Letters from Joseph Conrad (1928), p. 89

> fine, headlong, honest (or dishonest) sentiments, the art of H.J. does appear heartless. The outlines are so clear, the figures so finished, chiselled, carved and wrought out that we exclaim, — we, used to the shades of contemporary fiction — stone'. Not at all. I say flesh and blood, perfectly presented — perhaps with too much perfection of method. 74

Conrad knew the plague-spots of James's art — the too-much-ness of the perfection of his method. Perhaps, it was Conrad's aversion to over-fastidiousness that he could not for long endure Ford Madox Ford's theoretical discussions on the craft of the novel.

During the last phase of his career as a novelist Conrad noticed the emergence of the new school of fiction — the stream of consciousness school. He was liberal enough to recognize the potentialities and the innovations of the new artists but he could not be blind to the inherent limitations of the psychological method. In one of his letters to C.K. Scott Moncrieff, dated 17th Dec., 1922, he wrote of Marcel Proust :

> I have seen him praised for his 'wonderful' pictures of Paris life and provincial life. But that has been done admirably before .... One critic goes so far as to say that P's great art

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74. LL, Vol. I, pp. 270-71

> reaches the universal and that in depicting his own past he reproduces for us the general experience of mankind. But I doubt it. I admire him rather for disclosing a past like nobody else's, for enlarging, as it were, the general experience of mankind by bringing to it something that has not been recorded before. However, all that is not of much importance. The important thing is that whereas before we had analysis allied to creative art, great in poetic conception, in observation, or in style, his is a creative art absolutely based on analysis. It is really more than that .... He is a writer who has pushed analysis to the point when it became creative .... Those who have found beauty in Proust's work are perfectly right. It is there. What amazes one is its inexplicable character. In that prose so full of life there is no reverie, no emotion, no marked irony, no warmth of conviction, not even a marked rhythm to charm our fancy. 75

The passage amply brings out the serious limitations of the stream of consciousness school of fiction which finds its <u>forte</u> in analysis and not in "poetic conception, in observation, or in style". Conrad finds in Proust the negation of all the principles of aesthetics he cherished — reverie, emotion, irony and warmth of conviction and a marked rhythm to charm our fancy. His earliest statement in the Preface to <u>The Nigger</u> that true art lies in "the perfect blending of form and substance"[76] remained his ideal throughout his literary career. This conviction also shows Conrad's aversion to the mere scholastic formula or the division of art into creeds.

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75. LL, Vol. II, pp. 291-92

76. Prefaces, p. 51

Attitude to other Literary Forms :

Conrad's theory of fiction needs also to be considered in the light of his attitude towards other forms of literature, particularly poetry and drama. Conrad had never been a student of poetry although there are certain suggestions of his interest in Victor Hugo, Shakespeare and Byron. Richard Curle holds that the only poet about whom he had known the novelist to be at all enthusiastic was Keats. And it is quite plain that Keats's mind, with its sense of style and its sense of the concrete, was the type of mind that would appeal to Conrad. In a letter to R.B. Cunningham Graham , dated 26th Feb., 1899, he said :

> Chaucer I have dipped into, reading aloud as you advised. I am afraid I am not English enough to appreciate fully the father of English literature. Moreover, I am in general insensible to verse. 77

True, Conrad as a creative artist in prose seldom shows any interest in verse. But he is not averse to 'poetry' whether in prose or in rhyme. In his A Personal Record he considers the poet as "the seer par excellence".[78] And it is, perhaps, because of the vision of life that he himself shares with the greatest of imaginative writers. In a world delighting in the

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77. LL, Vol. I, p. 273 (Italics mine)

78. A Personal Record, p. 93

naturalistic stuff of Zola, Wells and Kipling, Conrad chose to write of the human destiny, of man's aspirations and achievements, and his dreams and illusions. This suffices to prove his poetic temperament even though he adopted prose as his chief medium.

If Conrad did not care much for poetry, he cared still less for 'drama'. He thought play-writing as the lowest of all forms of art — if, indeed, he considered it a form of art at all. As early as 6th Dec., 1897, he had written to R.B. Cunninghame Graham , expressing his contempt for drama :

> I have no notions of a play. No play grips me on the stage or off. Each of them seems to me an amazing freak of folly. They are all unbelievable and as disillusioning as a bang on the head — I cannot conceive how a sane man sit down deliberately to write a play and not go mad before he has done. 79

The letter was written much earlier before Conrad could himself attempt to dramatise some of his novels and short stories but he had no sympathy for the form as such. Perhaps its limitations on the stage and its so-called versimilitude annoyed him as he disbelieved in the capacity of a human agent to present an illusion of life. In the same letter he dubbed actors as a "lot of wrong-headed lunatics" and went further in his

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79. LL, Vol. I, p. 213

denunciation : "There is a taint of subtle corruption in their blank voices, in their blinking eyes in the grimacing faces, in the false light, in the false passion.[80]

Such was Conrad's loathing for drama (which was intensified, further by the failure of The Secret Agent as a play) that he seems not to have changed his opinion even after the lapse of a quarter of a century. Writing to John Galsworthy on 8th June, 1921, he confided :

> ... I have no great confidence in the art of actors as a body. As far as I can judge, it is as much conventionalized as it ever was in the palmy days of Italian Comedy ...
>
> I cannot have any pretension to dramatic gifts though I have my own ideas as to the artistic reproduction of life. [81]

This passage is quite significant. Conrad thinks that his main business is to present life but life as a man of his temperament sees is much too complex and elusive to be satisfactorily presented on the stage. In the above-quoted letter to Cunningham Graham (6th Dec., 1897), he had legitimately expressed his preference for marionette-shows to stage-drama because they create more illusion of life than either the cinema or the theatre.[82] His point is further illustrated in another letter

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80. LL, Vol. I, p. 213 ff. 81. LL, Vol. I, p. 257
82. LL, Vol. I, p. 213

to Richard Curle, dated 18th August, 1920 wherein he remarked :

> If one is to condescend to that sort of thing, well then, all considered, I prefer cinema to stage. The Movie is just a silly stunt for silly people — but the theatre is more compromising, since it is capable of falsifying the very soul of one's work both on the imaginative and on the intellectual side —— besides having some sort of inferior poetics of its own which is bound to play havoc with the imponderable quality of creative literary expression which depends on one's individuality. 83

It is quite true that Conrad never fully grasped the possibilities of the stage but he did guage its inherent limitations. With him as with Flaubert and Henry James, the medium of the theatre was incapable of producing the desired effects. Merely to read the dramatised version of The Secret Agent is to discover that the magic of Conrad's art has vanished in it.

And yet Conrad had a lot to learn from the art of 'drama'. Barring Henry James, nobody shows that meticulous concern for the 'discriminated occasion' as Conrad. He knows that if life is to be presented, it has to be a 'selected' one. Moreover, his theory of 'impersonality' and the creation of various 'central intelligences' is directly derived from drama. Both Flaubert and Henry James before him were not only keen

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83. R. Curle, Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad (1928), p. 125 See also Letters of Joseph Conrad to Richard Curle (New York, 1928) Letter No. 70

students of theatre but they also based their aesthetics on the technical achievements of the theatre. By absorbing in his technique the two important values of the theatre — urgency and immediacy — Conrad creates in his works that sense of the "dramatic present" which is the hall-mark of James's craftsmanship.

Image in the Mirror :

As Conrad worked persistently under a heavy burden of anxieties, his talent was also agonized. It goes, however, to his credit that he tenaciously adhered to the cherished canons of his art and succeeded in making powerful fiction out of desperate obstacles. He devised a personal method and style out of a profound condition of introversion and added to English fiction an exotic force of language and a sense of artistic design that today appear as two of its few redeeming assets.

Professor A.J. Guerard in his study Conrad the Novelist, has listed some major inward conflicts in Conrad which are to a certain extent relevant in the final assessment of Conrad's aesthetics and personal theory. They are as follows :

i) " A rationalist's declared distrust of the unconscious and

rationalists' desire to be a sane orderly novelist —— doubled by a powerful introspective drive that took the dreamer deeper into the unconscious than any earlier English novelist ;

ii) " A declared fear of the corrosive and faith-destroying intellect —— doubled by a profound and ironic scepticism;

iii) " A declared belief that ethical matters are simple —— doubled by an extraordinary sense of ethical complexities;

iv) "A declared ethic of simplicity, action, and the saving grace of work —— doubled by a professional propensity to passive dreaming ;

v) "A declared distrust of generous idealism — doubled by a strong idealism;

vi) "A declared commitment to authoritarian sea - tradition —— doubled by a pronounced individualism;

vii) "A declared and extreme political conservatism, at once aristocratic and pragmatic —— doubled by great sympathy for the poor and the disinherited of the earth; and, lastly,

viii) "A declared fidelity to law as above the individual —— doubled by a strong sense of fidelity to the individual, with betrayal of the individual the most deeply felt of all human crimes.[84]

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84. A.J. Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (1958), pp. 57-58

It would be difficult to improve upon the perceptive analysis of the critic in the presentation of the complex and elusive personality of an artist like Conrad. But it might be safely maintained that inspite of his personal inconsistencies and inward conflicts, his literary theories are not shrouded in mystery. He rarely wavers in his belief in the high seriousness of art. Again, though he considers the novelist's work to be the most difficult of all literary vocations, he sets high ideals of artistic accomplishments. The high points of fiction were, in his eyes, the sea-novels of Marryat and Cooper, the work of Flaubert, Turgenev, James, Maupassant, Stephen Crane and a mixed appreciation for his younger contemporaries —— W.H. Hudson, Cunninghan Graham and Galsworthy.

Of all his contemporaries Conrad's admiration for the Impressionists was of the highest order. His appreciation of Stephen Crane and W.H. Hudson was inspired, apart from personal acquaintance, by a feeling of affinity towards picturesqueness and romantic realism of their works. On the other hand, his respect for Henry James and his love for Ford Madox Ford emanated from his passion for technique. Both James and Ford in their own way helped Conrad to achieve a style and formulate an aesthetics which found better application in his works

following Lord Jim. Of his English contemporaries, although Conrad admired Arnold Bennett's style and acknowledged H.G. Wells's supremacy in the realistic novel, he never compromised with the sociological bias of their novels. Similarly, he had little sympathy for the stream of consciousness school of fiction. Marcel Proust was castigated for leading his readers to a vast swamp of associations and memories. Of still great interest is Conrad's attitude to Dostoevosky and Tolstoy. Like Henry James he felt repugnance towards the Russians. He condemned Dostoevosky as "the grimacing, haunted creature, who is under a curse"[85] and showed positive dislike for Tolstoy.[86] And yet he appears more on the side of the Russian masters in his philosophy of life than his English or American confreres. His passion for subjective drama and his concern for the psychological study of his characters, remind us more of Dostoevosky than of any other European novelist. In his Under Western Eyes the debt to the author of Crime and Punishment can hardly be underestimated.

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85. LL, Vol. II, pp. 192-93 (Letter to Edward Garnett), J.H. Retinger in his Conrad and His Contemporaries (1943), however, maintains that Conrad admitted "he thought Dostoevosky the greatest psychologist among novelists". (Quoted by Vernon Young in "Joseph Conrad: Outline for a Reconsideration" in The Hudson Review 2, spring 1949, p. 12)

86. Letters of Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, pp. 244-45 Dislike as definition of my attitude to Tols: is but a rough and approximate term .... Moreover, the base from which he starts — christianity — is distasteful to me. I am not blind to its services but the absurd oriental fable from which it starts irritates me.

Part of Conrad's distaste for Dostoevosky and Tolstoy (apart from his antipathy to their Pan-slavism) came from his recognition of their formlessness, the same qualities which had limited his enthusiasm for Dickens and Melville. For Conrad, if art and beauty were to unite as moral factions, then there would have to be vision as well as verbal skill, integrity as well as involvement. He was harsh to those he thought pseudo-artists, those who went through the motions without the substance, the fire, the restraint and the detachment that could transform everyday facts into an artistic vision and the particular into the universal.

Conrad like Hardy, Turgenev and James has his own peculiar literary gospel but his aesthetics needs no specific label or categorisation. It is an intimate revelation and a suggestion of some of the strangely hidden and mysterious truths of life. Like his avowed masters, Conrad puts his finger on the novel's personal condition and quality. The true novel is indeed an intensely personal communication. If it is not original in its seeing and sincere in its telling, it is nothing and less than nothing. It is then an artistically conceived and plotted interpretative analysis in extended prose form, of some human experience or experiences, skilfully mediated through the

imagination of a great personality. It is a comprehensive fictional reaction to some specially interesting aspect or problem in the welter of life. The true novel requires keen observation, a high order of imagination, the social sympathy represented by Chaucer, Shakespeare, Fielding and George Eliot and an intelligibly articulated view of life. Conrad through his fictional as well as critical writings confirms these views and supplements them through his own experiences as an artist.

In the final analysis, Conrad's theory of fiction emerges as the aesthetics of a creative writer who evolves his principles in the light of his own practice. It is more pragmatic and intuitive than analytical and inventive. Conrad's concern for recording the impressions of life, his plea for making the novel a receptacle for 'thought' and his constant reference to 'solidarity' are the basic postulates of his theory. His belief in the artist's integrity and his invididual capacity to grasp 'the passing phase of life' equally show his preoccupations with new techniques. The complexity of modern life as visualized by Conrad can hardly be rendered by the traditional chronological method of narration. The best method that Conrad can think of is that of 'broken-sequence' and the creation of such central intelligences as Marlow and the school

teacher (in Under Western Eyes). It is by these means, he suggests, that "the rescued fragments" of life can be held by the novelist. Conrad's theory which never hardens into a system also suggests a flexibility in individual methods. Every writer who is sincere and devoted to his craft will eventually find a way of saying things which he feels intensely.

If Conrad is as much romantic as realistic or impressionistic, it is plain that he experiments eagerly and for the most part successfully with the matter of device in narration. When analytical omniscence meets the case well; or when observant autoheroism, major or minor participation (as with Marlow in Youth and Mitchell in Nostromo) is more concretely effective as the countrolling point of view, Conrad will use that; or he will employ the familiar epistolary device pushed to a rather incredible length by Decoud in Nostromo. Anything is good which is effective; and Conrad for his part often finds effective a combination of devices that suggests not only his long study of other great artists in fiction but also his feeling of kinship with tortuous but clarifying ways of life itself.[87] His creative life is lit not merely by great ideals and memories, but also by great correspondent theories and principles.

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87. "Joseph Conrad and His Art" by George Herbert Clarke
The Sewanee Review, July, 1922
(The British Museum Reprint (Ashley), pp. 3-14)

FORD MADOX FORD

I) For it became very early evident to us that what was the matter with the Novel, and the British Novel in particular, was that it went straightforward, whereas in your general making acquaintanceship with your fellows you never do go straightforward .... To get such a man in fiction ... you must first get him in with a strong impression, and then work backward and forward over his past .... That theory at least we gradually evolved.

(Joseph Conrad : A Personal Remembrance, 1924)

II) The journalists go to things to look at them and use their genius in reportage. The great imaginative writer lives ... and then renders his impressions of what life has done to him.

(Mightier than the Swords, 1938)

Chapter Five

FORD MADOX FORD

Ford's critical writings deserve special attention in this study because he was not only a follower of the tradition of James and a confrere of Conrad but also a bold experimenter in the art of fiction and an ardent exponent of the Impressionist theory of the novel. Although his creative talent was strengthened by the First World War and found expression in the continued productivity of his later years, the best of his literary criticism was already available before 1914. He serves as a convenient connecting-link between the pre-War critics of fiction like Hardy, James and Conrad and the post-War artist-aestheticians like Lawrence, Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Though a prolific writer whose literary output ranges from poetry to history, biography, essays, reminiscences, criticism, novels and sociology, his critical theories deserves closer study for the revaluation of the late Victorian and early twentieth century schools of fiction in England.

By his historical placement Ford enjoyed literary associations which are rare in the history of letters. Almost from the beginning of the century when he was busy collaborating with Joseph Conrad, his public career can be described in terms of poets, painters and novelists whom he met, encouraged and published. His response to the demands and aims of several

artistic and literary groups, made him a significant transitional figure between the Pre-Raphaelites and the experimental British, French and the American writers of the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties. Among his immediate predecessors and well-known contemporaries, he knew Henry James, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, Stephen Crane, Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells and Galsworthy. During his editorship[1] of The English Review (December 1908 to February 1910) and the years he spent with Violet Hunt (1908 to 1915), he was the first publisher of D.H. Lawrence, a staunch supporter of Pound, an ally of the Imagists, and something of an elderly mentor to Wyndham Lewis and other young American writers. This is, perhaps, why he has been called a writer's writer. Ford had a deep insight into the techniques and theories of the art of fiction and his views influenced men so widely separated by time and nature as Joseph Conrad and Ezra Pound, and, at the other end of his life Earnest Hemingway, Allen Tate, Cecil Maitland and Robie Macaulay.

Despite the wide range of Ford's critical works and his persistent preoccupation with new techniques in the English

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1. In Return to Yesterday Ford recalled the authors he published We published contributions of one sort or another by Thomas Hardy, George Meredith, D.G. Rossetti — Posthumously, Swinburne, Anatole France, G. Hauptmann, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, W.H. Hudson, W.B. Yeats and even President Taft. Of the then youngish — speaking in terms of career — we published Mr. Wells's Tono Bungay serially in four numbers and short serial of Mr. Arnold Bennett in two, as well as Messrs. Galsworthy, Belloc, Chesterton and others of then similar standing. (Return to Yesterday (New York, 1932), p. 372)

novel, he has not been given any detailed study as a critic of fiction. As a matter of fact Ford has not been considered worthy of any serious study by the English critics. Ignored and slighted in later years, he received in England on his death, the grudging sarcasm of the obituarists of what in his day he had stubbornly resisted, "The Establishment".[2] Even those who have generously conferred upon Ford the belated laurel, have usually wondered whether the reasons for his neglect are embodied in the works themselves or whether extra-literary circumstances influenced critical judgement and popular reception. The "Conspiracy theory"[3] advanced by Edgar Jepson and by Douglas Goldring does seem to have some grains of truth in as much as literary and personal politics played some part in shaping Ford's reputation for better or for worse. But a more impressive explanation for his neglect, particularly in his native country, may be found in the bewildering variety of his literary productions.

Recent critical interest in Ford's writings, however, has been focused largely on the techniques of his major novels. Among his note worthy critics Mark Shorer, Robie Macaulay,

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2. E.D. Mabel: "The Last Pre-Raphaelite" in Craft and Character (New York, 1957), p. 257

3. See David D. Harvey's article "Pro Patria Mori: The Neglect of Ford's Novels in England" in Modern Fiction Studies IX, (Spring 1963), pp. 3-13

William Carlos William, R.P. Blackmur and Graham Greene, all with certain reservations, present Ford as a craftsman and able technician. They casually refer to Ford's theories of the novel in discussing his major works. There are at least two reasons why Ford's theories of fiction have not been extensively studied by critics. His death in 1939 has allowed little time for scholars to examine all of his work and bring out the aesthetic principles he advocated. Secondly, the study of theory itself is a recent phenomena in the criticism of fiction. Even writers of such stature as Henry James, Joseph Conrad, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf have only recently begun to have their due. It is not until 1962 that illuminating studies of Ford Madox Ford by such critics as Paul L. Wiley, J.A. Meixner and Richard Cassells have given comprehensive critique of the novelist's theory and practice. A study of Ford's published criticism, memoires, reminiscences and novels in the light of his literary heritage, his associations with the Pre-Raphaelites and his collaboration with Joseph Conrad amply shows his enthusiasm for the theory of Impressionism and the cult of the New Novel.

Formative Influences :

Though Ford is never tired of claiming that he was

forced upon a literary career by his grand-father, Ford Madox Brown, who wanted him to become an artist of any sort, he showed keen literary sense from the very beginning of his early adulthood. From his literary associations and his own studies he was aware of the distinction between "commercial literature" and "imaginative literature". Son of Hueffer, the distinguished music critic of The Times and grandson of Ford Madox Brown, the famous Victorian painter, he had in his veins something of their blood. On his father's early death, Ford's home became No. 37 Fitzroy Square, London, where his grand-father painted and entertained all the "big bow-wows" of late Victorian artistic society. Thus he spent his youth in the company of a large group of writers, musicians, and painters including D.G. Rossetti, William Morris, Ruskin, Swinburne, Holman Hunt, Edward Burne-Jones, Joseph Joachim and, perhaps, Liszt.

Ford's formal education was more broad-based and discursive. Though somewhat aimless in his ambitions, he read widely. In The English Novel, he gives an account of his early reading in fiction. Other than the 'penny-dreadfuls' which he preferred to "the three volume novels of William Black, Besant and Rice and other purveyors of the nuvvle", he read under his mother's direction such novels as Silas Marner, The

Mill on the Floss, Wuthering Heights, Sidonia the Sorceress, Diana of the Crossways, Far From the Madding Crowd and the two famous novels of Wilkie Collins.[4] When he was about seventeen, his grandfather introduced him to French fiction, recommending Madame Bovary and Daudet's Tartin de Tarascon and Tartin sur les Alpes. Ford also mentions reading at this time Smollett, The Castle of Otranto, Caleb Williams, and among American writers Mark Twain, Artemus Ward, Sam Slick and Will Carlton. He remarks that his reading in poetry was that of the usual school boy and young man interested in letters. Though recalled after forty years or so, this account of Ford's early reading is significant from our point of view. The study of Emile Bronte and George Eliot on the one hand and of Flaubert and Daudet on the other, suggest his later preference for self-conscious writers to those writing with mere 'inspiration' and at their best producing not artistic masterpieces but commercial best-sellers.

Ford's recall of the literary forces in England of his adulthood is also revealing. In one of his earlier reminiscences, he throws light on the influence wielded by the Henley group and the Yellow Book School. The former "admired

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4. The English Novel (London, 1929), pp. 115 ff

physical force, lawlessness, piracy, the speed of motor-cars, the deftness of lino-type machines, and they studied words from the Authorized Version and Sir Thomas Brown". Stevenson, R.A.M. Stevenson, Merriott Watson and George Warrington Steevens represented that school. The yellow Book School "concerned itself with 'form', with the expression of fine shades, with Continental models and exact language".[5] Adorned by Miss Hayne, directed by Henry Harland, they dominated the early nineties in England.

Ford supplements his account of the influence of the "literary Popes of London" in Return to Yesterday:

> The other literary Popes of London were in the realms of what was then called "Pure Literature", Mr. Norman Maccoll of the Athenaeum. In "Mixed Literature", it was Mr. W.L. Courtney ... who edited the Fortnightly Review and was the Literary editor of the Daily Telegraph. The Imaginative-literary Pope was my guardian, Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton who was the literary editor of the Athenaeum.
>
> All these people for me were sixtyish, bad-tempered, formidable, and all, with the exception of Dr. Garnett, of the sort I did not like. They were united by contempt for novel writing which was perhaps why I insensibly disliked them. And the curious symptom of the time was that nearly all of them with the exception of Maccoll wrote novels before they died. 6

In his reminiscences Ford suggests that amongst such people the

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5. Ancient Lights and Certain New Reflections (London, 1911), pp. 35-37
6. Return to Yesterday (New York, 1932), p. 175

conception of the novel as a form was unthinkable. Fortunately for him the French novelists had already opened new vistas in the writing of fiction and that influence was gradually pervading English fiction through the works of George Moore, Arnold Bennett and most of all through Henry James. Ford knew the English novelists very well and had his own preference — Jane Austen, Emile Bronte, George Eliot, and Henry James but he was also influenced by the French writers, notably Flaubert and Maupassant. Ford owes a good deal of his conception of the novel to these two schools — English and French — which were converging in the critical writings of Henry James.

One of Ford's earliest critics Milton Bronner in his contribution to the American Bookman, referred to another strain which had a decisive impact on Ford's critical theory and also on his poetry and fiction. He notes that inspite of Ford's war-inspired Vituperation of Prussianism, "his German blood and his German reading have had a large part in forming his poetic art". He further remarks: "The cause of his admiration of German verse is that the writers are enabled to use the ordinary language of their own circle and their own time. These poets impart to their poetry some of the virtues of prose — direct march of phrasing, avoidance of inversions and of

tortured constructions, scorn for the hackneyed literary coins that have been bequeathed by predecessors. The German poets as Hueffer sees them express life in the ordinary language, employed by living men".[7] Ford's ridicule of his contemporaries who learnt language from the Authorized version and Sir Thomas Brown and his later concern with the mot juste, justify Milton Bronner's view. The search for the "right word" which forms the central core of Ford's aesthetics, made him doubly conscious of his role as a critic of the novel.

Functions of Art in the Republic :

Almost from the very beginning of his literary career, Ford was conscious of the civilizing value of art in society. He later asserted that for him the world divided itself into those who were artists and those who were merely the stuff to fill graveyards.[8] In his essay "On the Functions of the Art in the Republic", he maintained that the chief value of the arts to the state is that they are concerned with truth :

> The artist today is the only man who is concerned with the values of life; he is the only man who, in a world grown very complicated through the limitless freedom of expression for all creeds and

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7. The Bookman (New York), Oct, 1916 (Vol. XLIV)
Milton Bronner: "Ford Madox Hueffer: Impressionist", pp.170-71

8. It was the Nightingale (London, 1934), p. 59

> all moralities, can place before us how those creeds work out when applied to human contacts, and to what goal of human happiness those moralities will lead us ... 9

Again :

> The province of art ... is the bringing of humanity into contact, person with person. The artist is, as it were, the eternal mental prostitute who stands in the market place crying: "Come into contact with my thought, with my visions, with the sweet sounds that I cause to arise — with my personality". He deals, that is to say, not in facts and his value is in his temperament. The assembler of facts needs not temperament at all but industry. He does not suggest, he states, and save in the mind of a professed thinker, he arouses no thought at all. But the business of the artist is to awaken thought in the unthinking.
>
> To this wideness of appeal, to this largeness of sympathy, the especialist can never hope to attain. He addresses himself to the instructed. The province of art is to appeal, to solace, the humble ... 10

Ford considered art (and also literature) to be one of the best media for establishing contact between man and man. He is, however, perceptive enough to distinguish between good art and bad art and also between good literature and mere market-stuff.

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9. The Critical Attitude (London, 1911), pp. 26-27

10. Ibid., pp. 64-65

In a very illuminating passage in The Critical Attitude he remarks :

> Speaking broadly, literature at the present day divides itself into two sharply defined classes — the "imaginative" and the "factual" — and there is a third type, the merely "inventive", which, if it be not in any way to be condemned, has functions in the republic nearly negligible. The functions of inventive literature are to divert, to delight, to tickle, to promote appetites; of imaginative literature, to record life in terms of the author — to stimulate thought. 11

Elucidating this point elsewhere,he asserts that the only human activity that has always been of extreme importance to the world is imaginative literature. It is of supreme importance because "it is the only means by which humanity can express at once emotions and ideas". Thus comparing Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species with Samuel Butler's The Way of All Flesh, Ford holds the belief that the later cannot be superseded because it is a "record of humanity". "Science changes its aspect as every new investigator gains sufficient publicity to discredit his predecessors. The stuff of humanity is unchangeable".[12]

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11. The Critical Attitude, pp. 31-32

12. Return to Yesterday, p. 178

Of all literary forms, Ford's preference was for the novel. His interest in poetry, inspite of his Pre-Raphaelite associations, was nominal and his adventures in the realm of drama were equally negligible. But he found fiction capable of conveying "the subtlest speculations of metaphysical or the most doctrinaire of social philosophies".[13] Being the most flexible of all the literary forms, it had the potential of saving the Republic from the onsluaght of philistinism. It was Ford's belief that in the present century the novel, if it were to hold the public status must not only seek new aesthetic dimensions but also constantly affirm and demonstrate its indispensability to a culture that he regarded as radically altered from the past in both its habits and tastes. On this account he deserves particular recognition not so much as a major theorist in the art of fiction, like James, nor even as the technician that he has so often been called, but as a main advocate of the novel as a cultural force, in which role he may well stand alone among English writers of his time.

With his individual aesthetics and his messianic vision of the role of literature in general and fiction in particular, when Ford surveyed contemporary English novels he

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13. The Critical Attitude, p. 34

found himself mortally disappointed. His views about "the temperamentally British novel, the loose, amorsphous, genial and easy-going thing",[14] are well known. What is less known is his sincerity in trying to bring the English novel at par with the French novel. In denying any "form" to the English novel he was, perhaps, exaggerating the facts but the core of his arguments is as valid as any other from the pen of great contemporary critics of fiction :

> ... there is no technical history of the English novel. There is, of course, a history. You could write about the lives of Defoe and Fielding and Sarah Fielding and Richardson and Scott and Dickens and Thackeray and Meredith and all the rest of them. But you can't find much more than three sentences to say of the methods of any one of them. They may have had great natures or they may have been buoyant story-tellers, but of art they hadn't a pennyworth between them, and they did not care even that amount for analysis of human nature. I don't mean to say that they weren't amusing or entertaining, or some of them romantic and others of them calculated to take you out of yourself; but, regarded as conscious literature their works are just splendidly null. 15

All these opinions were recorded in Ford Madox Ford's later reminiscences but there is no denying the fact that he held such views even before he met Conrad.

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14. The Critical Attitude, p. 107
15. Henry James (London, 1913), p. 53
In Thus to Revisit (1921) he further asserted:
But our creative literature, as distinct from that of all the rest of the world, is usually the work of happy-go-lucky and doctinairely obstinate Amateurs all whose practice is the rendering of their own moods of exaltation rather than the rendering of exact observation of life or even of Manners,p.8

By 1898 Ford had already developed his personal aesthetics in the light of post-Flaubertian novel. His views about the position of the novel in the 'nineties in England were not wholly untrue :

> At the date of which I am writing ... the Novel was still the newest, as it remains the cindrella of Art-Forms. The practice of novel-writing had existed for a bare two-hundred and fifty years: the novelist was still regarded as a rogue and vagabound, and the Novel was a "waste of time" or worse. And the idea of the Novel as a work of art, capable of possessing a Form, even as Sonnets or Sonatas possess Forms — that idea had only existed since 1850, and in France of Flaubert alone, at that. Writers had certainly aimed at progression d'effet , in short efforts since the days of Margeret of Navarre; and obviously what the typical English Novelist had always aimed at — if he had aimed at any Form at all — and the typical English critic looked for —if even he condescended to look at a Novel —was a series of short stories with linked characters and possibly a culmination. Indeed, the conception of the Novel has been forced upon the English Novelist by the commercial exigencies of hundreds of years .... The novels of Fielding, of Dickens, and of Thackeray were written for publication in parts ; at the the end of every part must come the strong situation, to keep the plot in the readers head until the First of Next Month. So with the eminent contemporaries of ours in the 'nineties of last century ... 16

The novel as "the Cindrella of Art-Forms" was in need of firmer public status and fresh direction. To accomplish

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16. Thus to Revisit , pp. 42-43

this, Ford wanted it to be released from the suspicion of triviality sometimes accorded to it by English readers in the past and regulated by standards serious enough to meet the requirements of intelligence, a desirable schooling being that of the French disciplined sophistication earlier submitted to by George Moore. Affirming that the novel stood ready to become "... the only vehicle for the thought of our day", he sought to guarantee its recognition in the world of affairs, perhaps even its thoughtful acceptance by statesman, by enjoining the novelist to win respect by craftsmanship rather than by hit-or-miss routine of the inspired amateur.

Ford's concern with technique had, in addition to its formal end, the utilitarian but defensible one of capturing the minds of reader not only impatient with older methods of narration but also exposed to the irritant of modern distraction. The enlarged opportunities of the novelist required increased technical proficiency to enable him to enforce his indispensable role in contemporary life.

Early Critical Writings :

As already suggested, Ford had been developing a kind of personal aesthetics (which he later called Impressionism') even before he met Conrad or knew Henry James

intimately. His immediate masters were the Pre-Raphaelite artists and poets and the French novelists. What he wanted from the British artist was a critical attitude, a sense of craftsmanship and consciousness of his vocation in the rendering of life. He acknowledged that there was no dearth of literary ability in English writers but they lacked in the literary sense :

> Literary Ability, in fact, is not the same thing as the literary sense; since the literary sense implies the power of self-criticism as well as the power to learn from others. The one has always existed: the other is a comparatively new-born thing, arising from a new and growing necessity ...
>
> Post-Flaubertian technique amounts to no more than a determination on the part of the artist not to nod as, some Academist has told us, Homer sometimes did. The writer of today must be self-critical or he will not be read even though he possesses a most beautiful talent. 17

As collaborator of Conrad and as editor of The English Review, he tried to inculcate the idea of conscious craftsmanship in the minds of English novelists. His own contribution to the theory of the novel is also an attempt to bring English fiction at par with French.

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17. Thus to Revisit, pp. 14-15

Ford's early critical awareness is fully evident from his book Ford Madox Brown (1896). From Ford Madox Brown and from his many years of close association with the Pre-Raphaelite group, he acquired an ardent devotion to the life of art. Though he did not care for some of his fellow artists individually he subscribed substantially to their view of representing life as seen through the temperament of the artist. Ford also gained from his literary sensibility and his intensely personal evaluations of art and life. His book on Ford Madox Brown, though more of an appreciation than criticism, does illustrate that early in his career, Ford had tentatively established a critical viewpoint. His summary of Brown's artistic development in the last chapter of the book is particularly revealing for tracing Ford's own critical acumen.

Ford sees Brown's work as reflecting his naive, imaginative, sympathetic, humorous personality, not only in the subjects he chose but also in his techniques and use of materials.[16] He was more original than most of the Pre-Raphaelites, who, Ford charges were apt to be imitative, to suppress individuality. Significantly, Ford admires Brown's

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16. Ford Madox Brown: A Record of His Life and Work (London, 1896), pp. 402 ff.

realistic work, inspired by Holbien rather than by the Italian primitives, and thinks much less of his "aesthetic period" when he paid more attention to the "sensuous side of his art", to decoration for its own sake, to "balanced masses as opposed to pictures of combined details". Already to be noted is Ford's concern with technique and with the shaping influence of temperament upon the artist's work. He is aware of the danger in an over-elaborate manner inappropriate to content, or in a technique which fails to focus or arrange the composition clearly for the viewer. Here is established his preoccupation with the "harmoniousness of combined details" and with the dramatic quality of a work of art, by which he apparently means not merely the telling or suggesting of a story or action. As the remark on Destiny implies, the total impression of a given work moves the spectator into a particular mood of self-forgetfulness and into a special train of thought. These views, so typically Pre-Raphalite, prepare for the impressionistic theory and practice Ford later developed in collaboration with Conrad.

We have no record of Ford's earlier thinking on the art of the novel as inspired by the French masters but his work on Ford Madox Brown suffices to disprove the thesis that

he built his theory by imitating James and Conrad. In his study of Ford Madox Ford, Mr. Richard Cassell notes :

> James' "The Art of Fiction" and Conrad's preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus might not unreasonably be taken as the immediate texts from which Ford shaped the outlines of his fictional theory. 19

It is true that Ford's collaboration with Conrad and his closer association with James helped him develop his theory of fiction on sounder basis, but the charge of imitation is tantamount to denying Ford an individuality. The fact is that James, Conrad and Ford, all went to the same sources, particularly French, for inspiration and derived their own conclusions after reading the masters. James was more interested in "the dramatization of situations" and rendering of life through "central intelligence"; Conrad found his forte in the creation of the complex methods (particularly the 'Broken-sequence') and inner struggle of the protagonists in a drama. But Ford's chief motive was the search for the mot juste and the plea for progression d'effet . As a matter of fact, they were all sharing common principles of aesthetics.

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19. Richard A. Cassell, Ford Madox Ford (Baltimore, 1961),p.38

They differed only in attitudes and emphases.

Ford's theory of fiction can be better understood in the light of his association with the Pre-Raphaelite School. In view of his theory of impressionism and of the techniques he was to develop in his novels, it is pertinent to review briefly certain aesthetic assumptions held in common by both the Pre-Raphaelites and the Impressionists.

As against the "inspiration" theory of the typical English artists (Ford mentions Thackeray and other commercial novelists), the Pre-Raphaelistes and the Impressionists upheld the theory of conscious art. They had a distrust of inspiration without the guidance of skill in art. Rossetti speaks of the agonies of writing, of the "fundamental brain-work" that must go with the "music" to make up a poem.[20] Flaubert struggled endlessly to achieve le mot juste,[21] Conrad wrecked his nerves and "wrestled with the Lord" over every book and James calculated long and carefully to achieve his intended effects. For all of them art was a way of life and the life of art offered a legitimate and noble contribution to humanity. They were not men whose central passion was to make a living,

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20. W.M. Rossetti, ed. Family Letter with a Memoir (Boston, 1895), I, pp. 416-17

21. Flaubert, Letters, ed. Richard Rumbold Tr. J.M. Cohen (London, 1950), p. 37.

or to preach, or to reform. The Pre-Raphaelites, to be sure, sought ennobling subjects more consciously than, say, Oscar Wilde or Remy de Gourmont, but then they all felt, although in varying degrees of intensity, that a faithful rendering of reality, by presenting a picture of things as they are, gave to their art a moral atmosphere or sense from which the reader could infer as much in the nature of a sermon as he would.

After necessary qualifications, certain other similarities might fairly be noted among these serious and self-conscious writers in England and France from 1850 to 1900, for, despite their differences, the principles these writers held in common take us to the very heart of their aesthetic concerns. First, there is the view of the relationship of art to nature, which is easy to oversimplify. Basically it is expressed by Flaubert when he says "Art is not Nature".[22] For the Pre-Raphaelite, the Aesthetics, the Impressionists, reality is as we perceive it to be, not as the "masters" (who imitated Nature) or the public or anyone else thinks it is.

This idea is reflected in Pater's concern with the "object as it really is". And for Pater, "the just step

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22. Letters, p. 228

towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly".[23] Henry James in 1888 expressed his adaptation of this assumption in his famous statement that "a novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or lesser according to the intensity of the impression", and his corollary of this that "the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer".[24] For Ford, strongly influenced by both the Pre-Raphaelites and Henry James, the artist is "a sensitized instrument, recording to the measure of the light vouchsafed him what is — what may be — the Truth".[25]

Whatever the author's vision of reality, the later English writers James, Conrad and Ford sought to adhere exactly to this principle which allowed no compromise with any desire the author might have to preach or reform. A work of art was for them undeniably an expression of temperament — "the enlarged reflection" of the artist's personality — but

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23. Geoffery Tillotson, Criticism and the Nineteenth Century (London, 1951), pp. 82-94

24. "The Art of Fiction" in The House of Fiction (1962), p.29

25. Thus to Revisit, p. 49

it must always be a detached one. Flaubert, perhaps, felt this most strongly of them all. "The artist must stand to his work as God to his creation, invisible and all powerful: he must be everywhere felt but nowhere seen".[26] In theory, he was searching for a "pitiless method (with) the precision of the physical sciences", an idea which Zola later expanded into a theory of art based on the laboratory method. Few writers would go so far as Zola did in reducing art into science. But from Rossetti with his belief in the value of "fundamental brainwork" to the novelists who paid such close attention to manner we see writers who sought an objective, intellectual control over undisciplined inspiration.

One characteristic control, they discovered, was made possible through a new concept of perceived experience. It was to effect their methods of representing reality and, in particular, to create a profound interest in the technique of the writer's point of view. If reality is as we perceive it to be, then in representing reality the artist should present the action or emotion precisely as it strikes the consciousness, and not literally or completely, but rather through selection to reproduce the pattern of stimuli as they reached the

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26. Letters, p. 98

conscious mind.

The consequences of this attitude towards representing reality, strengthened in time by the studies of psychologists were significant for artists in expanding their subject-matter and in suggesting new and effective methods. These new concepts made them aware of the fragmentary nature of conscious experience and of the fact that the mind orders events according to its own laws. Writers, especially poets, became interested in trying to capture and immobilize those fragments. In English poetry the evidence was first seen clearly in Rossetti's attempts to sustain the "spiritual ecstasy" of fleeting moments.[27] So far him a "sonnet is a moment's monument" and "some basis of special momentary emotion" was one of the stimuli he needed for poetic creation.[28] Pre-Raphaelite paintings and poems characteristically captured dramatic moments. Christina Rossetti, Ford realized, avoided abstractions and generalized statements in her verse and brought to her poetry intimacy and precision, and in many of her poems illustrated a single emotion, an instance or heightened feelings.[29] In the novel a more remote but similar

27. P.F. Baum, "Introduction" to D.G. Rossetti, House of Life (Harward University Press, 1928), pp. 27-28

28. W.M. Rossetti, Family Letters and a Memoir I, p. 418

29. The Critical Attitude, p. 179

shift is observable. Flaubert's elaboration of particular scenes (a succession of moments) were attempts to portray every separate perception of himself or his characters relevant to the effect to be created. The implication for the novel of the search to explore significant moments and "rescued fragments" were manifold. Most important of all was the effect this search had on the novelist's handling of point of view. Flaubert used Madame Bovary's limited consciousness for his novel but Henry James developed his elaborate theory of the role of "reflectors" in the novel.

The New Form :

Ford's critical theories follow quite naturally from the assumption that the artist must present the world as he sees it and not as authority or convention dictates. Post-Flaubertian fiction in France and the aesthetic principles of the Pre-Raphaelite group fully lived up to these ideals. Particularly for the Impressionists the functions of the artist and critic merged, as is witnessed by Oscar Wilde who thought "Criticism of the highest kind" was that which "treats the work of art simply as the starting-point for a new creation".[30] Ford appears to have thought that bringing

30. "The Critic As Artist", Works (New York, 1927), p. 566

fictional techniques to his criticism would appeal to a larger audience than mere academic criticism and literary history would, and that a fictional method might be especially useful in educating the English speaking world to the salvation of human letters. But his assumption that the artist's primary devotion must be to technique imposes limitations upon his critical evaluations. He relegated to the second rate not only the novels of commerce and escape (the "muvvle" as he called them) but also several major novels which fail in whole or in part to follow the principles laid down by Flaubert, Maupassant or James. He could always admit the historical importance of novels he did not like and could admire passages in them, but also chastized their authors for excesses, intrusions, digressions and moral comments.

It was in the "New Form" of the novel as Ford visualized that the real redemption of what he took as "the English novel", lay. Though French in origin, the discovery was shared by James and possibly by Moore and Bennett. Like James and Conrad, Ford also stressed the point that the novelist must pay profound attention to matters of technique and structure before the "effect of life" is achieved. He

took care to note, however, that the end in view was not a "machined form" but "the sheer attempt to reproduce in words life as it presents itself to the intelligent observer", whose life has a pattern, not one of birth, apogee, and death, but a woven symbolism of its own.[31] James had metaphorically described it as the "figure in the carpet".

Ford is more explicit about 'Form' when he deals specifically with the novels of Henry James, Joseph Conrad and Thomas Hardy. In his book Henry James (1913) and also in his essay on the master in Mightier than the Sword (1938), he considers James to be the "greatest living writer and in consequence, for me, the greatest of living men". He acknowledges that like Shakespeare and Turgenev, James has "plenty" of personality and cannot be fully revealed by the critics but at the same time he maintains that through "his craftsmanship, his conscious literary modifications, his changes of word for word, the maturing of his muse" he has betrayed his art to us. Although Ford opines that Henry James's greatness lies in his being "the historian of one, of two, and possibly of three more civilizations";[32] he bases

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31. Thus to Revisit, p. 46
32. Henry James, pp. 9-22

his judgements mostly on the craftsmanship of the novelist. He admires James's ability to take the merest hint from life, his "germ" to make it more complex and symmetrical, and to work out his stories so that every word, every action, every "apparent digression" works towards the inevitable end. James maintains a sense of life by "making the digressions appear like real negligences, as they appear in the life we lead". Since James exhausts all the aspects of his "affairs" and moves his stories towards a single culmination, he attains the effect of inevitability. That is valuable because it gives to his work "a feeling of destiny, a given semblance of an implacable outside Providence".[33]

Ford looked to both Henry James and Conrad as masters of "form" in modern English novel. His praise for Conrad's Elizabethan personality and for his French genius in art is eclipsed by his lavish acclamation of Conrad's craftsmanship and sense of form in the treatment of his subjectmatter. He finds Conrad's earlier work when the author was not under much pressure from literary agents, technically perfect. Thus "Youth", "Heart of Darkness" and such other nouvellos appear to him as perfect specimens of finished art. But he has his

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33. Henry James, pp. 159-61

reservations about Conrad's later works. Novels like Nostromo, Chance, Under Western Eyes and The Secret Agent are "finished off with the quick, deft touches of a de Maupassant curte and the rapid invention of any efficient writer of short stories." Ford thinks that since the leisured mood of the earlier period was gone, Conrad worked continuously under a "cloud of panic" so that the conclusion of each of the later novels is less protracted and impressive than was warranted by the carefully "building up of such an immense fabric".[34]

Ford's views about Conrad's "political romances" have been recently echoed in the critical appraisal of such critics as Thomas Moser who believe that Conrad's art lacked its earlier glow after Nostromo. But the point to be emphasized is that the later novels of Conrad though written under distraction are quite a different kind of literary product. Though one could condemn the complex design and the baffling structure of Chance and Rescue, it is difficult to deny a "form" to Nostromo, Under Western Eyes, The Secret Agent and Victory whose literary excellence has been acknowledged by such distinguished critics as M.C. Bradbook,

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34. Mightier than the Swords, p. 87

F.R. Leavis, Richard Cule and several other scholars.

The critique of Hardy's novels in Lightier than the Sword equally reflects a prejudiced vision. Ford's thesis that Hardy "was not a novelist, never wanted to be a novelist"[35] is based on the flimsy grounds of his earlier apprenticeship as a poet and his so-called carelessness about his novels. Of all the novels of Hardy, Ford considers only Jude the Obscure to be a fine specimen of form because "in its working out he did employ some sort of conscious artistic knowledge".[36] Few critics consider Jude to be a technical success. It is regarded as a kind of philosophical chronicle and has most of the defects of structure in its length and digressions. Ford's rejection of such masterpieces as Tess of the D'urbervilles and The Mayor of Casterbridge as not at all representation of good craftsmanship appears to be quite biased in view of the wide admiration of these novels by men of literary sensibility.

The defects of Ford's literary theory and his critical errors, particularly in the assessment of the works of the realistic novelists like Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells and John Galsworthy emanate from his pre-conceived notions of the

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35. Lightier than the Sword, p. 138
36. Ibid., p. 137

impressionistic art. It is true that Ford as a votary of technique dogmatically upholds certain theories but he is not unconscious of the variety of human talent. In his book on Joseph Conrad he wrote :

> But these two writers were not unaware that there are other methods; they were not rigid in their own methods; they were sensible to the fact that compromise is at all time necessary in the execution of every work of art. 37

Thus he acknowledged the freedom of the artist to develop his own 'method' and also allowed him the freedom of temperament to treat his subject-matter as he thought best. Dealing with the works of Shakespeare and Turgenev he had realised "that the greatest works deviate occasionally from the strict sequence of cause and effect".[38] Finally he maintained that each writer must discover his own rules; the only limitation is the interest of the reader; the principal criterion for a technical rule is the degree of its success in conveying a sense of life.

Theory of Impressionism :

Ford's slogan of "the impression over the statistics" made a case for the vital function of the novelist who alone, through his gift of direct and imaginative

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37. Joseph Conrad, p. 193 (Italics Ford's)
38. The Critical Attitude, p. 59

apprehension, could present a unified vision of the world at large and as writer of fiction close the breach between the divided areas of factual information. Because statistics bring no insight into the nature of private life and its passions, the novelist alone can record such experience of other men as the increasingly isolated reader lacks, the writer not moralizing but simply "rendering".

Ford held, then, that the novelist must be above all an impressionist, a register of his time, or indeed of earlier centuries, not by the laboratory methods of the especialist but by using his temperament and personal insight as measures of experience. Obviously, he wanted the term 'Impressionism' to denote higher powers of comprehension and creativity. While still cherishing a belief in the supremacy of the artist, Ford directs his arguments not to affirming detachment of the artist from the vulgar but to the far more cogent point of the artist's value to society and, finally, to the positive function of the arts as a whole to the maintenance of civilization.

The central problem of the impressionist novelist as Ford conceived it lies in the "form" of his novels which must give the effect of the formlessness and fragmentary nature of

life as it meets the individual consciousness, while at the same time everything must move in direct, carefully calculated line to the inevitable conclusion. Art has eternally sought to achieve order out of the disunity and confusion of life, but it was the impressionists, primarily, who sought to keep the feeling of that very disunity and confusion in the forefront of their work. The reader is deceived into believing that he is experiencing life as it is, while the novelist is actually arranging and managing his tale so as to leave the reader with a view of life clearer, more organic, and more meaningful than life itself could probably ever give. The secret lies in concealing the art. Ford is right in defining Impressionism as a technique which reinforced the realistic frame of mind : "Thus the real trait d' union between all these authors (The modern realists from (Flaubert) and modernity in general" was not their temperaments, which were all different but "the technical one which this writer prefers to call Impressionism."[39]

The impressionist group of novelists with their background of French realists and English pre-Raphaelites adhered to the central principle of impressionist-realist technique: the rendering rather than the relating of events in

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39. The March of Literature (New York, 1938), p. 639

order to achieve an illusion of reality. Rendering is the dramatic presentation of a scene to give an impression of immediacy. Ford defined it as the "reproduction of one art or another of the impressions made upon one by one's observation".[40] As at a play, the reader is to be carried away so that he thinks himself at the scene being depicted. Bunyan, for example, succeeds in involving the reader because he tells his story in simple language, "using such homely images that the reader, astonished and charmed to find the circumstances of his own life typified in words and glorified by point, is seized by the homely narrative and carried clean out of himself into the world of that singular and glorious thinker."[41]

Ford is so much fascinated by the impressionistic technique that he writes most of his memoirs and criticism in the same manner. The efficacy of the method is perhaps the most vital force in Ford's aesthetics. For him the stuff of a 'memoir' and a 'novel' is the same: the aim being a "picture of one's time" and the technique being the "rendering", not "recording" of life.[42] Though he seems to give impression of

40. Great Trade Route (New York, 1937), p. 32
41. The English Novel, p. 86
42. In his Dedication to Dr. Michael, Ford wrote :
"You will say that volumes of memoires have no forms and that this collection of them is only a rag-bag. It isn't really. The true artfulness of art is to appear as if in a disordered habiliments. Life meanders, jumps back and forwards, draws netted patterns like those on the musk-melon. It seems the most formless of things.... But if one is to set down one's life ... one should so present the pattern of it that, insensibly, it in turn, presents itself to your awareness". (Return to Yesterday, pp. V-VI)

adherence to his own notions of accuracies, "accuracies of my impressions" rather than to "factual accuracies", he shows sincerity in the pursuit of "truth" :

> I may —and quite frequently do — plan out every scene, sometimes even every conversation, in a novel before I sit down to write it. But unless I know the history back to the remotest times of any place of which I am going to write, I cannot begin to work. And I must know —from personal observation, not reading —the shapes of windows, the nature of door-knobs, the aspects of kitchens, the material of which dresses are made, the leather used in shoes, the method used in manuring fields, the nature of bus-tickets. 43

This passage clearly indicates Ford's passion for meticulous details. But what distinguishes him from Zola and other naturalists is his method — impression and not photography.

Ford's "Impressionism" has not only annoyed his critics but has also led some of them to doubt what he says. An anonymous critic of Ford writing in The Times Literary Supplement, under the caption "The conscious Artist", wrote :

> To explain fully Ford's alienation from the English establishment one must add ... other "ungentlemanly factors".... One was Ford's habitual romancing inaccuracy, which he elevated to the level of an aesthetic principle, and

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43. It was the Nightingale, p. 204

> called Impressionism. Impressionism, for Ford meant a subjective version of experience for which there could, or at least should, be no appeal to facts. 44

The statement does not seem to do full justice to Ford. As already suggested, Ford was as much concerned with facts of life as any other imaginative artist but like other literary masters — Turgenev, Flaubert and James — he thought that the writer should be free to mould his material as suits his design. Ultimately it comes to the problem of technique which is the crux of Ford's theory of fiction.

The numerous concerns of Flaubert and his followers for technique were of enormous value to James, Conrad and Ford. Ford has abundantly made clear the significance of Flaubert's literary set and their preoccupation with the manner of their art. Flaubert, the Goncourts, Turgenev, Gautier, Maupassant, Zola, James, he writes, all

> discussed the <u>minutiae</u> of words and their economical employment; the <u>charpente</u>, the architecture of the novel; the handling of dialogue; the rendering of impressions: the impersonality of the author. They discussed these things with the passion of politicians inciting to rebellion. And in these <u>cenacules</u> the modern novel — the immensly powerful engine of our civilization — was born. 45

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44. <u>The Times Literary Supplement</u> (June 15,1962), p. 437
45. "Techniques" in <u>Southern Review</u> I (July, 1935),pp. 23-24

These basic technical issues were also the special concern of Conrad and Ford. During their collaboration the two writers talked endlessly about the numerous practical problems of their craft. The principles which they had argued and then partially tested in their collaborative novels Ford accepted as the criteria for his theory of fiction. He formulated a method compatible with the high aesthetic ideals and artistic dedication of his Pre-Raphaelite inheritance.

Writing about "The Battle of the Poets" in Thus to Revisit, Ford gives an interesting account of the Impressionists and the Les jeunes — Ezra Pound, D.H. Lawrence, Gaudinson, "H.D.", Robert Frost and T.S. Eliot. The Impressionists in the plastic or written arts had been the leaders of the movement that came immediately before these young writers. And the main canon of the doctrine of impressionism had been this : "The artist must aim at the absolute suppression of himself in his rendering of his subject".[46] The Cubists, Vorticists and Imagists charged that the Impressionists were only trying "to hypnotise the public". This was exactly what the Impressionists had tried to do :

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46. Thus to Revisit, p. 138

> We wanted the reader to forget the writer — to forget that he was reading. We wished him to be hypnotised into thinking that he was living what he read —or, at least, into a conviction that he was listening to a simple and in no way brilliant narrator who was telling —not writing —a true story. 47

Ford is suggesting that the novelist should not only conceal himself behind the personages of the human drama he is depicting but he should also so fascinate the reader that there is a "willing suspension of belief" in his response to the work of art. All this is part of the skill that the creative artist should acquire in order to appeal to his readers.

To impressionistic writing Ford ascribed a special intention which removed the implication of subjective lyricism and exacted from the writer a disciplined choice and shaping of his materials. Whether embodied in a single passage or a complete book, an impression was, for one thing, a compressing and foreshortening of a much broader field of possible data. In the novel it represents the difference between Tolstoy's expansive and panoramic treatment of war and Crane's concentrated and suggestive handling of the same topic in The Red Badge. Properly determined and implemented the impression could be heightened, from a base in action, so as to become symbolic and

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47. Thus to Revisit, p. 53; See also Joseph Conrad, p. 194

thus bring home to the reader the central, enduring truth of an aspect of human life. Herein lay the strength of Conrad in his stories such as "Youth" or The Nigger of the Narcissus and in his middle novels, particularly The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes, as virtually "condensed histories" rendered through selected instances of human psychology and passion. In stressing this combination of selection of incident with universality, Ford clearly distinguished the aims of impressionism in his group of English novelists from those of naturalistic realism and the provinciality of its outlook.

One of Ford's notable critics, Hugh Kenner, acknowledging his contribution to the technique of modern English novel claims that it is Ford, and Ford almost alone, who in the first decade of this century "absorbed and transmitted the discoveries of Stendhal and Flaubert on an English wavelength". Paying glorious tributes to his "self-effacing virtuosity" the critic compares Ford's "impersonality" with T.S. Eliot's. He considers Eliot's impersonality — "an author suppression compatible with great local intensity" but for Ford "it was not a matter of intensity but of mass : progression d' effet ".[48] It was bound to be for the simple

48. Hugh Kenner : "Remember that I have Remembered" in The Hudson Review, Vol. III, No. 4, 1951, pp. 602-10

reason that a poet has to work on a comparatively smaller scale whereas the novelist's field is much vaster. Unless he takes recourse to other methods he cannot suppress his personality as effectively in a novel as is possible for a poet.

Ford's critique of fiction brings to the fore the problem of point of view and its effect on the form of the novel. If the author is to be invisible, some means have to be found to tell the story, to give it, as Henry James says, focus. When James objected to Conrad's use of Marlow's consciousness as a narrative focus, Ford maintained the "it is in that way that life really presents itself to us".[49] Thus "form" is achieved less by the demands of the "affair" a novel recounts than by the mode of the consciousness viewing it. The aim is psychological verisimilitude, that rightness with which events are represented according to the workings of the narrative intelligence. The method applies not only to a first person narration but also to action viewed from the consciousness of one or several characters in a third person account, or to action viewed from the consciousness of the unseen author telling the story as it comes to his mind.

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49. Thus to Revisit, p. 55

The narrative point of view with all its variations gave rise to the complicated time-schemes of many impressionistic novels. The time-shift was the strongest instrument these writers had found to break away from the form and structure of the traditional novel. Plotting according to the impression of the seen or unseen narrator gives greater freedom than a method committed to the more or less chronological unfolding of action, for then the author can inflate or deflate the significance of thoughts, feelings, events, and arrange and juxtapose them for the creation of specific effects. Ford holds that the "supreme function" of impressionism is to select out of the myriad fragments of experience what is necessary to tell a story successfully and then to arrange these fragments for the best effects. James is the master of this art because "he can create an impression with nothing at all."[50] It was this aspect of the time-shift technique of the Impressionists that the later school in fiction — the stream of consciousness school — exploited. In replying to a remark by the New York Times, Ford maintained that the time-shift technique is indispensable to the detective writer and "delights every Body" and "that technique is identical with that of all modern novelists, or of myself ... or Proust".[51]

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50. Henry James, pp. 152-53

51. It was the Nightingale, pp. 193-94

Closely allied to Ford's objective method and the time-shift technique is the technique of "juxtaposed situation". In practice it amounts to a scene being rendered on a series of levels, both stated and implied. As practised by Stendhal and Jane Austen, it is the device by which "the juxtaposition of the composed renderings of two or more unexaggerated actions or situations may be used to establish, like the juxtaposition of vital word to vital word, a sort of frictional current of electric life that will extraordinarily galvanize the work of art".[52] For Ford, the advantage of this method is that it surprises the reader with one of the little surprises that give a novel the quality of life. Though certainly not a new technique of story-telling, the device of juxtaposing situations was extended by writers like James, Conrad and Ford, who carried it to new extremes and intensities by the juxtaposition of impressions, objects, images and metaphors.

The synthesizing device for giving a novel the vibration of life and at the same time shaping the work into an organic form was that of progression d'effet,[53] the gradual revelation of character, of the conflict to be

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52. The March of Literature, p. 804

53. In his book Joseph Conrad, Ford defined progression d'effet as follows:
"... every word set on paper ... must carry the story forward and, that as the story progressed, the story must be carried forward faster and faster and with more and
(Continued ..)

narrated, of the meaning and significance to be perceived by the reader. It offers an economical mode of rendering action and contributes to the cumulation of effect on every level of the story —the "conflicting irresolutions ending in a determination".[54] The shifts in time, the juxtaposed situations and impressions, the succession of words and images, are so to speak, subservient to the progression d'effet, because by the selection and arrangement and by the choice of language the story progresses inevitably to its final effect.

The examples Ford uses to explain progression d'effet are all taken from long short stories or nouvelles (like James's The Turn of the Screw and Conrad's "Youth" and "Heart of Darkness"). Ford seldom wrote short stories, but, like James and Conrad, he was trying to achieve in his full-length fiction the consciousness and precision of the Conte

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more intensity" (p. 210)

Robert F. Haugh in his Joseph Conrad: Discovery in Design (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), p. 7, defines it as follows : - "The term employed by Conrad and Hueffer in their conversations on the art of fiction, embraces growth, movement, heightening of all elements of the story: Conflict and stress if it is a dramatic story; intensity and magnitude of image if it is a poetic story; complexity of patterns; balance and symmetry; evocation in style used for mood and functional atmosphere".

54. Henry James, p. 168

or the nouvelle.[55] Despite the leisurely manner in which these writers tend to begin their novels, they carefully construct the progression d' effet which itself shapes the structure of their stories. The novelist, if he wishes to achieve an impression of inevitability, must apply the principle of "justification".[56] This meant that every element in a novel must justify its presence and so win the reader's rational conviction. On this reasoning a character, for instance, cannot be launched convincingly until nearly everything in his background has been established — in particular the facts of his birth and family history. The novelist must at every turn decide what he wants to tell or withhold about his characters or the action and exactly how he wants to do it. Ideally, every such decision is consistent with the novel's design.

To Ford and Conrad, the problem of language was partly one of discovering means to eliminate language, to reduce the number of words on the page, not only because long handling has tended to rob words of their edge but also because a loosening of the fabric of statement opens the way

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55. Joseph Conrad, p. 204

56. Ibid., p. 204

to a closer perception of reality. By this route, the impressionists arrived at one of their most characteristic and subtle techniques, that of the omission of entire scenes, even such apparently crucial ones as would be developed at length by other novelists. Verification of Ford's point comes from The Secret Agent when Conrad omits a direct account of the central bomb incident yet so sharply visualizes contributing details. James employed the same device in The Ambassadors and The Wings of the Dove.

Like other impressionistic techniques advocated by Ford, the art of omission helped serve the end of inducing the reader to participate imaginatively in the action of the "affair" and thus intensify his sense of vicarious experience in happenings significant for contemporary history. But Ford seldom denies the entertainment aspect of his art :

> The first thing that you have to consider when writing a novel is your story, and then your story — and then your story! If you wish to feel more dignified you may call it your "subject". Once started it must go on and on to its appointed end. Any digression will make a longer, a patch over which the mind will progress heavily. You may have the most wonderful scene from real life that you might introduce into your book. But if it does not make your subject progress, it will

> divert the attention of the reader. A good novel needs all the attention the reader can give it. And then some more. 57

In order to make the story more interesting, Ford and Conrad made several experiments. One such experiment was that a story must open with " a breathless sentence". At any rate the opening paragraph of a book should be of the tempo of the novel performance. He observed that "our ideal novel must begin either with dramatic scene or with a note that should suggest the whole book"[58]

Before everything else, Ford and Conrad had maintained that a story must convey a "sense of inevitability". In Ford fatality is of human or historical making and proceeds inevitably from causes, however remote. Thus fate enters into the atmosphere of his novels but not as an agent from outside the scene. Human error, consequently, cannot be eliminated, though its effects may be traced without lapse from dignity into the vice of pity. The right tone in a serious novel should be of austerity, so that glimpse of horror may occur but the ending itself remain unharrowing. In order to achieve a sense of inevitability the author must make the character's action the

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57. It was the Nightingale, p. 192
58. Joseph Conrad, pp. 171-73

only action that character could have taken: "It must be inevitable because of his character, because of his ancestry, because of illness or on account of the gradual coming together of the thousand small circumstances by which Destiny, who is inscrutable and august, will push us into one certain predicament".[59]

Ford, emulating Flaubert and Henry James, disliked "propaganda" novels. He agreed with Conrad that "the novel is absolutely the only vehicle for the thought of our day" and that with the novel one could "enquire into every department of life" and explore "every department of the world of thought". But the one thing that you cannot do is to propagandise as author for any cause: "You must not, as author, utter any views: above all you must not fake any events ...." Ford, however, does not rule out the possibility of the novelist's "mouthpiece". Granting that the artist's "business with the world is rendering, not alteration", he feels that if the urge "to amend the human race is so great that you cannot possibly keep your fingers out of the watchsprings", there is a device that you can adopt: "you must ... invent, justify, and set going in your novel a character who can convincingly express

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59. Joseph Conrad, pp. 204-5

your views".[60] Hence the need for a Dowell, a Tietjens in Ford, Marlow and other "reflectors" in Conrad and a host of "central intelligences" in Henry James.

The difference between the traditional and the Impressionist novelists was not that the latter did not "moralise" but that they veiled their identity and let the work of art speak for itself. In one of his later critiques, Ford suggested this point in a beautiful image :

> But if you imagine the High Alps to be the intolerable Victorian moralists with, in their crannies, the forgotten, humble novelists of their day, you will have part of a useful pattern. Then consider the foothills below them to be Conrad-James-Crane-Hudson group .... And below the foothills runs a rolling plateau of champagne country that may stand for Lawrence and contemporaries ....
>
> The Middle Victorians professed themselves inspired by that (Moral purpose) as by a divine afflatus and the whole world believed them. The next generation of writers sensed the danger .... So neither Conrad nor James, neither Crane nor Hudson were in any sense major moralists. Those then were the Impressionists, with, of course, behind them the great shades of Flaubert and Turgenev. The one passion that united them all — as perhaps it unites all great and serious writers — was that to leave behind them a creative record of their time. They said : 'Once we have rendered our day, with a due vision for the inner truths of it — then the world can draw its own morals ....' 61

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60. Joseph Conrad, p. 209

61. Mightier than the Swords, pp. 266-68

Ford's objection to the art of H.G. Wells and even Galsworthy was not so much for their "realism" as for their deliberate attempt to ameliorate the world. Ford, nourished in the school of imaginative writers, thought that they had not the time and patience to "live" their experience and distil from them the quintessence of art :

> The journalists go to things to look at them and use their genius in reportage. The great imaginative writer lives ... and then renders his impressions of what life has done to him. He lives, that is to say, in, if possible, a fine unconsciousness .... He must, in order to get perspective, retire in both space and time for the model upon which he is at work... still more, he must retire in passion... in order to gain equilibrium. 62

Turgenev's greatness lies precisely in the fact that he carried the rendering of the human soul one stage further than any writer who preceded or followed him. He had supremely the gift of identifying himself with the passions of the characters with whom he found himself. And then he had the gift of retiring and looking at his passion with calmed eyes.

Style and Language :

Ford as a champion of the Impressionist movement in England, views it in the European background. The Flaubert-

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62. Mightier than the Swords, pp. 207

Turgenev-Conrad-James wave of Impressionism lasted prominently in Anglo-Saxondom for nearly thirty years — say from 1893 to 1923. Its world course was longer, lasting, as Ford claims, half a century, from 1870 to 1920. The world adopted the Impressionists, Ford reminds us, because "it was weary to death of the large-scale Moral-Purposist's — Polinicism. It wanted some Hamlets". But it was weary not merely of "the Eunuch-Widow point of view"; it was weary of it and their "language". According to Ford "the unease" took visible shapes in various parts of the world: "The French got busy about mot justes; they could no longer stand the hackney-cabman styles of Balzacs and Dumas. The Slavophils of Russia expelled Greek-and-German derived words from their manifestoes; the English Pre-Raphaelites, led by William Morris, determined to use none but Anglo-Saxon expressions."[63]

In novel —and in the impressionistic novel in particular —a large part of the struggle to achieve a sense of the real, a vibration of life, was the quest for a language, a style, a cadence, a word that could pass the test of "justification". Since Ford was recommended to Conrad as a stylist, we would expect, as he tells us, that his main pre-

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63. Mightier than the Swords, pp. 270-71

occupation during the collaboration was with style and language. Ford had condemned his contemporaries for the use of the words borrowed from the Authorized version and Sir Thomas Browne. His plea was always that the writer should use the language of his own day, not the fine and literary language but the vernacular. He finds models of excellent vernacular prose in the English and American newspaper of the eighteen-twenties, in Clarendon and Cobbett, and in his contemporary, W.H. Hudson. He had turned to these and other writers of non-fictional English prose after he had modified his admiration for the more intricate and conscious styles of Flaubert, James and Conrad. He never, however, modified his faith in the methods by which Flaubert and Conrad sought to discover exact words and to achieve a non-literary, non-poetic vocabulary.

The vernacular Ford sought meant that the writer had to avoid words which stuck out of sentences by being so unusual or so brilliantly apt that the reader pauses to admire them. "A style" as Ford puts it, "interests when it carries the reader along".[64] A style ceases to interest when by reason of disjointed sentences, over-used words, monotonous or jog-trot cadences, it fatigues the reader's mind. "Simplicity"

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64. Joseph Conrad, p. 193

is the formula for sustaining the interest of the reader. "We wanted to write", Ford says, "as the grass grows".[65] In their attempt to achieve a "habit of style" Ford and Conrad reached the same conclusions which Coleridge and Wordsworth had revealed in their discussions on the "poetic diction". For Wordsworth "there is no essential difference between the language of prose and that of metrical composition". For Coleridge, "the opposite of prose is not poetry but verse; the opposite of poetry is not prose but science". Ford's view of the matter was not very different from his predecessors of the Romantic period. "We agreed that a poem was not that which was written in verse but that, either prose or verse, that had constructive beauty". Hence the resolution during the collaboration: "each of us desired one day to write Absolute Prose".[66]

The search for le mot juste, the proper cadence, a new form, which consumed the attentions of Conrad and Ford, resulted during their collaboration in a political allegory (The Inheritors), a historical romance (Romance) and an ironic tale of comic deception (The Nature of a Crime). Perhaps, Ford more than Conrad took the opportunity to experiment with

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65. Thus to Revisit, p. 52
66. Joseph Conrad, pp. 35-36

ways to catch fleeting impressions. Conrad had great difficulty with the English language because many words have different shades of meaning and the exact image was difficult to render in English as it was easier in French. However, both the artists starting from this point moved in different directions. Conrad found a language that was less exacting but more rewarding, less purple but more evocative and suggestive than the language of the early phase of his writing. Ford working on his own in various romantic genres, in contemporary comedies of manner, and in novels analysing politics and society, developed a variety of techniques to render his "vision" of the world.

Ford's tireless insistence on adequation of language to the thing perceived or the sensation undergone and his meticulous concern for impressionistic writing page by page, phrase by phrase, mass by mass, has not invited brickbats from critics as has James's elaborate style. But there have been critics who deplore his endless labours to acquire a style. However, Ford was always working on the assumption that communication between man and man is only possible by a close and serious study of language, and its proper use in a work of art. Hence his jibes against the Victorian masters

who received their inspiration from heaven and wrote in the full fury of passionate outburst. The typical English attitude, Ford points out, was responsible for lack of a critical attitude in the writer who was always prone to over-write and succumb to slipshod habit of expression. From his own experience Ford knew that it was a difficult job dealing with 'word':

> It is not more easy for us to put words together: it is more difficult because we have more sense of words. And we who go at it with persistence, underpairing, in the face of inevitable failure ... are the gallant spirits. 67

There is some reason to believe that Ford went at this task with more "furious earnestness" than Conrad always thought wise. Nevertheless, Ford kept at his work, developing a theory of style from the English habit of avoiding direct speech. He implies that he borrowed the idea from James, in whom, he says, was united the European international culture, with its interest in the technique of form, and the Anglo-Saxon imagination, with its habit of shrinking from direct statement and its consequent tendency to allegorize.[68] Ford sought a more literal translation of literate colloquial speech than James did and carried the technique much further

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67. Joseph Conrad, p. 158 68. Henry James, p. 171

than James and in another direction.

Again, the task is to convey a sense of discontinuity of life while creating the ordered world which art communicates. The task is genuinely a poetic one, for such a close attention to the careful juxtaposition of objects, of the images and impressions they convey, and of associations they bring to the minds of both the character portrayed and the reader, and such a concentration on the creation of rhythmic effects are traditionally more matters of concern for the poet than for the novelist. The adoption of such concerns by the novelist, echoing as they do Flaubert and preparing the way for Joyce and Virginia Woolf, demonstrate as well as anything else the shift in emphasis in the modern novel away from plotted action ordered by the sequence of chronological time to the plotted imitations of human consciousness, and from largely narrative concerns to almost completely poetic ones.

Ford's Critical Method and Impressionism :

In one of his suggestive critical passages M.D. Zabel has summed up his views of Ford's theory and principles thus :

> The fact is that Ford's aesthetic origins and associations served him both well and badly. They made it impossible for him to live any other life than that of literature, and to live it whole-souledly and passionately .... They kept him through five decades a lover of good writing, original talent, authentic invention. But his dedication to form, style and the mot juste, coupled with his habit of pontificating, desire to faire ecole at all costs, and compulsive addiction to paper, likewise kept him writing, prosing, repeating himself, when there was, very often, little actual substance to work on. Style, technique, manner, and method were kept grinding away, half the time saying little and producing what can be, for long and desperate stretches, a garrulously tiresome parody of his intentions. 69

This seems to be quite a fair assessment of Ford's critical writings. As a theorist Ford does suffer from some of the defects of the Impressionist school and also from his own limited vision. His high ideas of fiction and his literal adherence to the technical theories expounded by Flaubert and James led him to reject the English tradition without due examination of the merits of the authors concerned. Thus, the new achievement in style and technique opened new vistas in the realm of fiction but despite the best intentions of the Impressionists their circle of readers was far smaller than that of Dickens and Thackeray. So the theory in a way contradicts itself in as much as the pretext of talking to a majority of the public proved a mere stunt.

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69. M.D. Zabel, Craft and Character (New York, 1957), p.260

The second major defect of Ford's theory is his unscrupulous attitude towards "facts" in his critical pronouncements. Among his immediate predecessors both Flaubert and James held fast to the ideal of truth, verisimilitude, the "solidity of specification". But Ford did not feel himself bound to such restrictions. He wanted free play with his material and adopted the novelist's technique for criticism. The result was what were "impressions of truth" for the author, were, very often, congenital lying for his enemies and embarrassements for friends. Though his anecdotal tone makes his criticism interesting and readable, it mars his writings of precision, compactness and the detachment of real criticism, as Matthew Arnold might call it. Not only that he is very often garrulous and baggy, he interspersos his remarks with innuendoes on his role as a mentor and a sort of literary godfather to his younger contemporaries and immediate successors. As a matter of fact, Ford was more of a cultivated journalist than a critic. Though he rendered excellent service to the English letters as editor of The English Review and later of The Trans-Atlantic Review, his professionalism did leave some of its marks on his criticism. Sifting good, bad and indifferent material, he could not help himself being muddled, rambling

and discursive in his literary judgements. One has to wade through a pile of husks and chaff to reach a few grains of truth from his memoires and several other critical writings.

But when all is said about the limitations of Ford's criticism and his shortcomings as a critic, there remain a good many things to be said in his favour. His position among critics of the modern English novel and especially among the Impressionists remains distinct. True, Henry James had paved the way in English fiction criticism but it was left to Conrad and Ford, indoctrinated as they were with high ideals of life and art, to break new grounds by evolving and formulating its aesthetics. Ford's theory of fiction, drawn from Flaubert, Turgenev, Maupassant, the Pre-Raphaelites and the critical writings of James, committed him to plead for the dispassionate rendering of life, to giving the effects of the formless and fragmentary nature of life as it meets the individual consciousness. His concern with techniques designed to achieve these aims —— the point of view, the time-shift, the progression d'effet, the selection and juxtaposition of events and impressions, and an objective, non-literary language —— are more than an extension of the theories of James and Conrad. They definitely point to the future of the technical

achievements in the English novel —— the stream of consciousness technique. Perhaps it may not be an exaggeration to say that Ford did for fiction criticism what Pater and Rossetti did for poetry and painting.

Ford has, perhaps, the clearest 'historical sense' among most of the fiction critics of his age. He knew the Henley group and the yellow Book school thoroughly well. As editor and sometimes as literary columnist and reviewer, he had to study the growth of schools and traditions, the sources of literary movements, their achievements and decline. All this discipline is reflected in Ford's criticism of the novel. In this particular branch of knowledge even Henry James may not succeed in beating him. One has only to learn from his remarks in Mightier than the Swords, The English Novel and The March of Literature for the proof of his sound knowledge of artistic movements and a sense of literary perspective. He remains to date one of the best literary chroniclers of the period between the last decade of Queen Victoria's reign and the outbreak of World War II.

Another great characteristic of Ford's criticism seems to be his prophetic note in his critical pronouncements. Complaining of the declining influence of James-Conrad-Hudson-

Crane school of Impressionists, he remarked in 1938 :

> What brings back a forgotten artist is what I call an essential honesty —— of writing, of purpose, of selection, of presentation. The poor dear Impressionists are, it would appear, today going through a period of eclipse .... But I think that those men will surely return —— because they had, each, minds fixed only in their work and the methods of their work. So they achieved that certain honesty of purpose that unites all writers who have returned. 70

It took them not even a decade to return. The post-War revival of these authors has won for them glories and laurels not only from both sides of the Atlantic but also from countries as far-flung as India and Japan.

Ford's criticism of certain novelists, particularly Henry James, Joseph Conrad and Thomas Hardy are regarded even today as the earliest specimens of fiction criticism. It was Ford who likened Conrad to an Elizabethan and claimed Hardy to be "a poet and not a novelist". These ideas are echoed in Dr. F.R. Leavis's writings on fiction. Again, Quentin Anderson's famous thesis of a metaphysical unity in James's later works, emanates from Ford's remark that James was a modern Dante. One can find many more illustrations in the

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70. Mightier than the Swords, pp. 288-89

critical theories of Ford which directly or indirectly influenced many successive writers in England and U.S.A. Ezra Pound always recognized Ford's part in revolutionising English letters : "The revolution of the world", he has written, "began, so far as it effected the men who were of my age in London in 1908, with the LONE whimper of Ford .... " More recently he said : "I don't know whether justice has yet been done to Ford. I went to England in 1908 to "learn" from Yeats —— and stayed to learn from Yeats and Ford".[71] This is a poet's remark. For a better assessment of his historical position we have only to study deeply his impact on Conrad, Hemingway, Edith Wharton and a host of American writers whom he inspired through his works and personal encouragement. One would have been wrong about the details, but not about the facts that, in the age of Kipling, Haggard and Wells, an age of increasing carelessness among good writers, he was a conscious artist. His theory of the novel and his own practice as a novelist brought such insight and vision that both for their art and their 'truth' we cannot ignore or by-pass.

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71. Quoted by Kenneth Young in Ford Madox Ford (Longmans, 1956), p. 16

CONCLUSION

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(F.M. Ford : Mightier than the Swords, 1938)

Chapter Six

CONCLUSION

The theory of Impressionism in English novel emanates primarily from sources in contemporary European fiction, philosophy and fine arts. The term as used by James, Conrad and Ford Madox Ford distinctly defines their position in the perspective of late nineteenth century fiction criticism. A new technique to present the special "vision" of the artist was considered to be the *sine qua non* of the impressionistic theory. Already in the writings of William James and Bergson and in the paintings of Courbet and Manet some parallelisms with the impressionism of Dostoevosky and Turgenev were noticed by perceptive minds. Thus, impressionism in English fiction is as much the result of cross-currents of inter-disciplinary movements as the product of the maturity to which this form had attained during its cavalcade of more than two centuries.

In the preceding chapters we have discussed in detail the cogitations and critical theory of the major Impressionists in English fiction. One thing that strikes us most is the note of modernity in their works. They were ill-content with ready-made ways of putting a story together as with ready-made ways of interpreting character. They not only revolutionized the traditional concept of fiction but also

brought to it some of the subtleties of pictorial and plastic art. Above all, wrestling with the mysteries of human psychology, they developed criteria suited to that elusive subject. The Impressionists were naturally inspired by the new psychology in their critical and creative ventures. The complex identity of the soul as revealed by psychology was tapped by them before the stream of consciousness school specialized in exhausting the "inner world". They were as much concerned as the old writers with the "psyche" as the focus of life experience. Only, with their modern conception of the "psyche", they have wanted new technical devices and new procedures for rendering it. Thus the Impressionists show a tendency to throw overboard terms intellectual, logical, sentimental. They rely more on impressions of the senses — on a mere succession of sensations — for rendering the psyche. Their idea is, perhaps, to make the effect at the same time more real and less sharply defined.

As the theory of impressionism in the English novel is the result of the cogitations of creative writers, we can ill-afford to consider it in abstract or in isolation from their works of fiction. The tendencies in such show to what extent the correlation between theory and practice is possible.

Judging from the contemporary criticism of the novel we may safely claim that there is no one theory of fiction in England between 1880 and 1914, nevertheless, the Impressionist school stands distinct from the schools of Naturalists, Realists, Symbolists and more traditional writers.

Our analytical survey of the factors determining the status of the novel and the new dimensions which were added during the period under review, i.e. 1880 to 1914 (Ch.I) have been confirmed and amplified in the detailed theories that followed. We have seen how the uncertainty about the status of the novel had diminished with stalwarts writing poetry and drama not in a position to challenge the supremacy of fiction. The novel had obviously gained considerably in stature by 1914 and the image was steadily built of its dominant position.

The Impressionists in fiction criticism steer clear of the extremes of Naturalism and Art for Art's sake-ism. They do not approve of Zola but they recommend a kind of realism as a literary method which includes such points as accuracy of details based on observation or impressions, a concentration on the familiar rather than the exceptional and as objective a view of life's data as the artist can achieve.

Their disagreement with "aesthetes" is not just for the rejection of their sensuousness and "escapism" but also because they present life in a way which does not accord with their ideal of "rendering". The regular development and inter-play of these two divergent views about the relation of the novel to life provide one of the most valuable dialectics of novel criticism.

The conception of morality in the critical writings of the Impressionist novelists shows their broad-minded and liberal attitude to life. The moral nature of the artist, his duty to avoid exciting our baser instinct, his guidance of our sympathies towards certain characters and away from others, his use of poetic justice, the general observance of "moral tone", the avoidance of pessimism and uncertainty as to mankind's destiny, are all consistently examined and prescribed. James thinks of morality as part of one's conception of life as a creative adventurer in a social world. Hardy extends the range of the novel by including "explosive material" which is necessary in the wider interest of social health. Conrad is never tired of reminding us of the values of "piety and renunciation" in a work of art. Obtrusive didacticism of contemporary Victorian fiction is as much despised by the Impressionists as the sensual flippancy of some of the French

novelists. The ethics of the novel receives due attention of these artists because they have left Victorian priggishness far behind and are looking forward to the post-war phase of liberalism even permissiveness in social and individual life.

As "Impressionism" implies holding the prism upto nature, the critics obviously strain every nerve to highlight the importance of new devices and novel techniques to render life. The conventional concepts of plot and character undergo radical changes and the novel is viewed in terms of "structure", "point of view", "dramatis personae" and "style" which includes harmony of tones. Some of these theories were discussed by the late Victorian critics but they were discussed systematically and even exhaustively by the new writers. Having imbibed divergent influences from different disciplines, they thought of novel-writing as something of a composite art capable of all nuances of literary craftsmanship. James rejected the old conception of the Novel of Action and the Novel of Character. To him the "impression" was the be-all and end-all of all artistic venture. Conrad and Ford viewed the whole problem of technique in a more radical manner. Their cogitations throw light on the conception of each of the constituents of the novel as integral parts of a unified whole. Another

remarkable tendency of criticism, that in favour of the novel's structural unity, as unity like that of an organism or of music, is seen to be moving gradually towards a conception of the vital inter-relation of all parts, including character and plot and eventually towards a recognition of autonomy.

The Impressionist view of technique is further clarified when we place them before the succeeding generations of writers — the stream of consciousness school. The Impressionists and the post-Impressionists were, strictly speaking, realists in a special sense. Their concern for landscape and in-scape effects and the passive subjection of their imaginations to the inflow of impressions constitutes their brand of realism. James Joyce is often spoken of as having propounded the theory of the lyrical, the epical and the dramatic forms of novel and his preference for the last form, i.e. dramatic or objective novel is highlighted in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. But to serious students of Impressionist critical theory, James Joyce's thesis offers nothing new. The whole gamut of theories developed after 1880 offer suggestive discussions on objectivity, dramatization, selection and discrimination in the technique of fiction. The aims of James and Conrad coincide in as

much as they are concerned with the rendering of a special kind of truth seen through their special temperament and set in a particular light. The post-Impressionist is not primarily concerned with the representation of nature. His aim is, out of elements derived from nature, to make an abstract composition for rendering some truth of his own conceiving. His truth may be of the utmost significance in the ideal world, but it is not necessarily a fact of nature. He may ignore or amend perspective which is an attribute of three-dimensional nature. Any new dimension taken into account brings in a new perspective. His abstract design may involve a measure of deformation or conventionalization of the objects presented. The Impressionist theory of fiction seldom advocates such "abstract design" which found vogue in the post-war literary creations, especially in novel.

The significance of this study lies precisely in finding the basic facets of novel-criticism and their application to creative writings of the critics. Placed as the Impressionists are in the transitional phase of the development of the novel, they are neither iconoclasts nor ardent prophets of the future. They reject the typically Victorian notions of novel- writing to suit the modern

sensibility and yet they accept certain tenets of their aesthetics which will be found to be of value in all ages to come. They are the exponents of "subjective drama" in novel and yet they seldom hold a plea for mere sensations and memories or internalization of the external. Both in theory and practice, they evince a measure of sanity and balance. Theirs is the ideal of subjective - objective depiction of life as seen through their special temperament.

The pre-Impressionist critic of fiction generally compared the mind of the novelist to a reflector of external objects —— holding the mirror upto nature. The Impressionist may be likened to a radiant projector which makes a contribution to the objects it perceives. The first of these (the mirror) was characteristic of much of the thinking of the Victorian mind; the second (the lamp) typifies the new conceptions of the poetic mind of the Impressionist. The new critics advocate a judicious and harmonious fusion of matter and method. They see no dichotomy between spontaneous rendering of impressions and thoughtful planning for a work of art. Technique for them is a means to an end and not an end by itself. Fiction in their hands becomes a fine art which may imbibe the best of poetry, drama, music or sculpture

or architecture and yet it remains an art quite distinct from the others enjoying its special status. The truth which must finally emerge from any history of novel-criticism is that the ultimate use of theoretical enquiry is to lead us back to the work of art itself. Our study of the critical theory of the Impressionists in the light of their creative writings does reveal certain aspects of their art which have not been highlighted so far in their correct perspective and which, therefore, need to be investigated for a better appreciation of their works.

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